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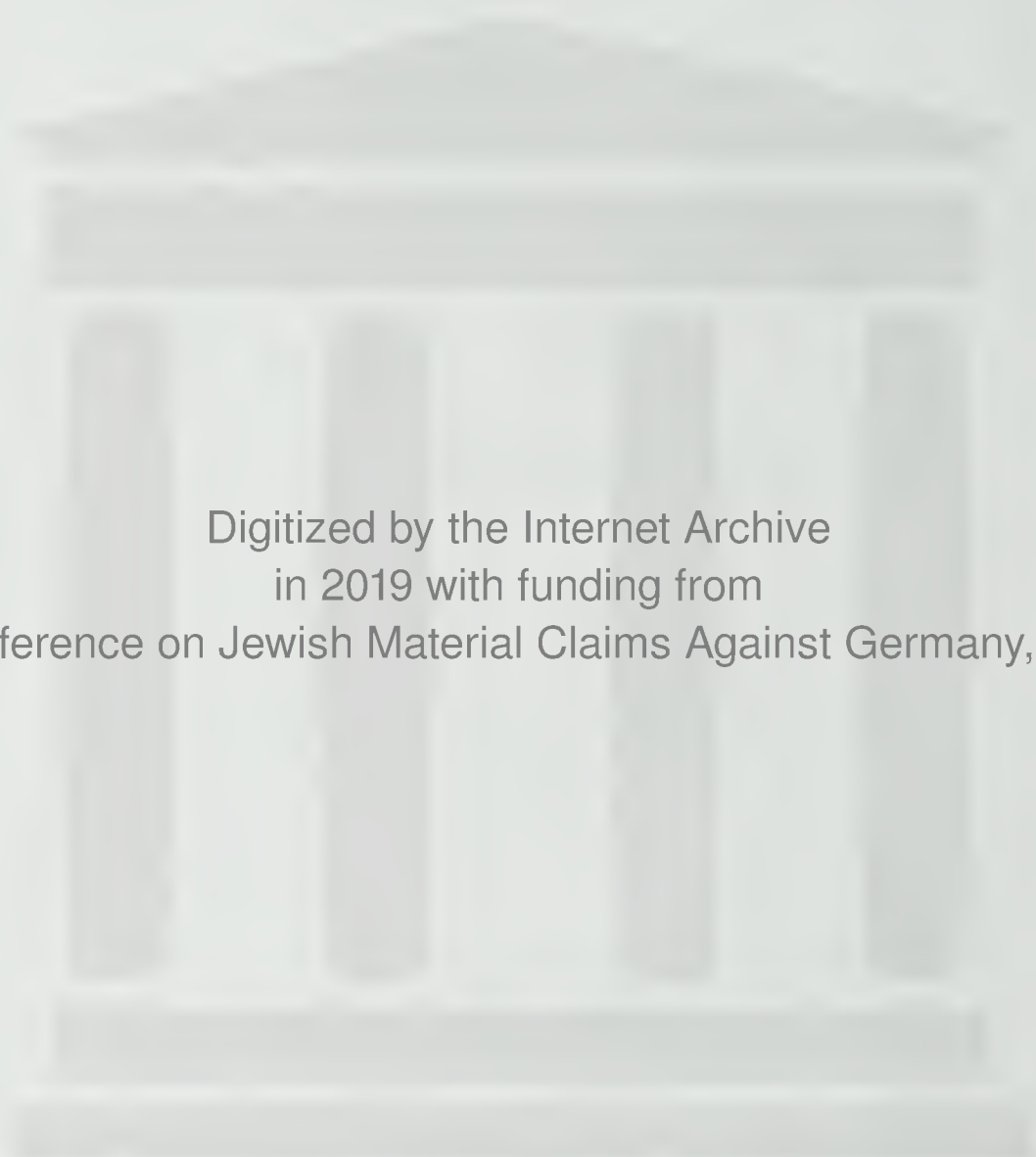


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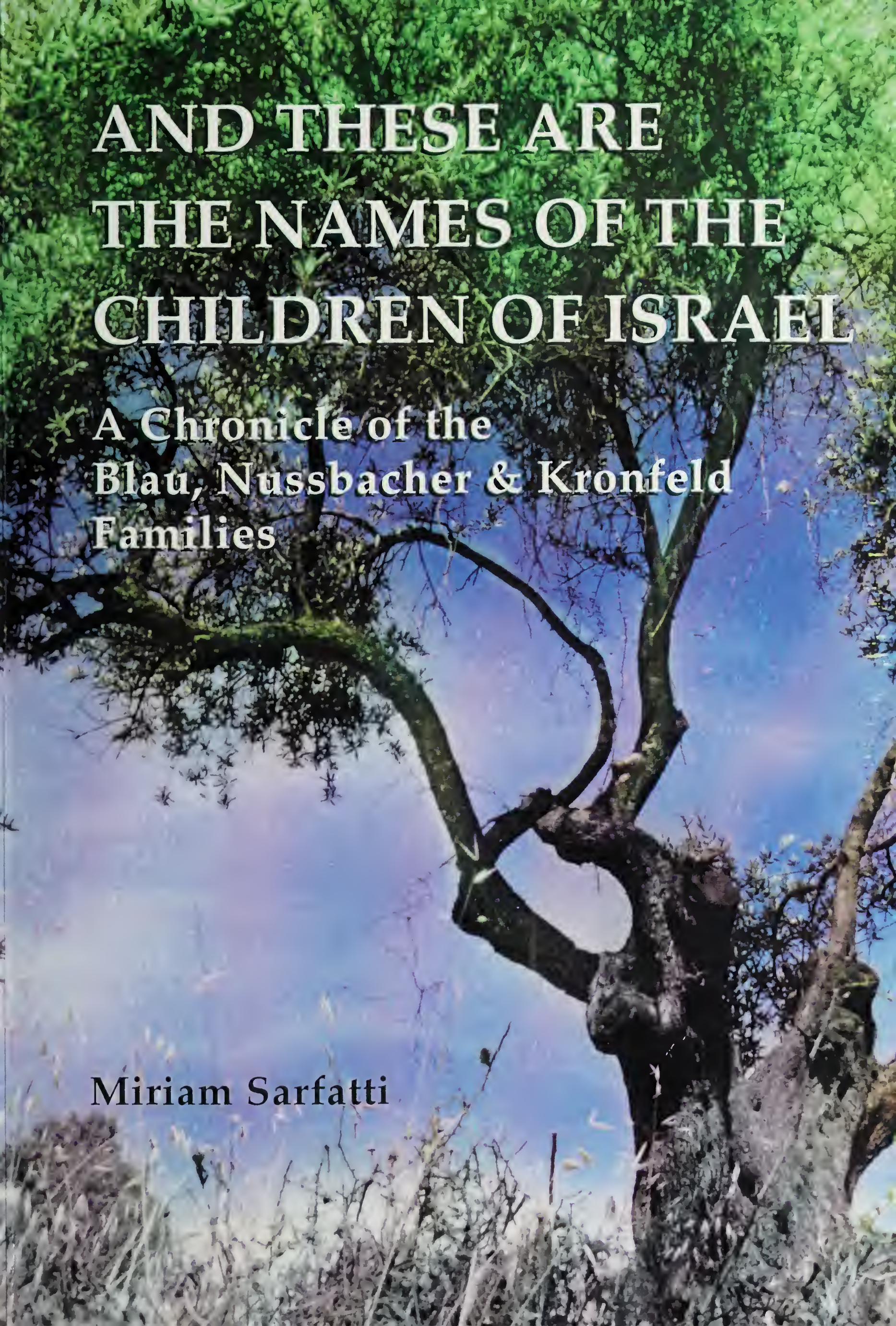
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AND THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

A Chronicle of the
Blau, Nussbacher & Kronfeld
Families

Miriam Sarfatti

AND THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

A Chronicle of the Blau, Nussbächer and Kronfeld Families

**by Miriam Sarfatti
edited by Binyamin Sarfatti
translated by Channah Horowitz**

This book was published with the financial aid of the bequest of my Aunt Klara Weiss, née Kronfeld.

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H93
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1999
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Hebrew edition - 1995
Revised English translation - 1999

Miriam Sarfatti



Pagination: Miriam and Binyamin Sarfatti

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“And these are the names of the Children of Israel...”

“Although he had enumerated them by name during their lifetime, he enumerated them again after their death, in order to show His love for them...”. This explanation by Rashi answers the question why the names of the Children of Israel had to be enumerated again at the beginning of the book of Exodus, since they had already been enumerated at the end of the book of Genesis. This explanation implies that the Torah wanted to stress the importance and the specificity of each and everyone in the community, the love borne towards each and every individual, even though he be only a part of a larger community. Each one has his special characteristics, his importance and his place in society.

As a child I grew up in Belgium without any relatives around me, no grandparents, no aunts and uncles, no cousins – only my mother and father and a brother. From a very early age I felt the striking difference between myself, a Jewish girl, and my non-Jewish friends, blessed with grandparents, uncles and aunts. For a long time I tried to find out where my extended family had “disappeared” to. I realized slowly that my family had not escaped the extermination that descended upon European Jewry, and a major portion of the family had perished in the Holocaust.

As a result of the disaster that befell the Jewish people, and with the passage of time, there is hardly a soul left in the world to relate the chronicles of my far-flung family. I have therefore decided to take this mission upon myself before it is too late.

In telling my story I will mention those included in the six million about whose details I was able to gather, who perished in the Holocaust. My aim is that we should know and remember those of our relatives, whose lives we were unable to share, so that they may be for us more than a numbered non-entity among the millions that were lost to us. I have tried to breathe the breath of life into the souls that have disappeared without a visible trace.

Entire families were destroyed in the Holocaust, and at times I did not succeed in discovering the names of family members. It is my fervent prayer, that inasmuch as we have realized that “they were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided”, so shall we speedily see in our days that the “nations shall rejoice with His people, for He will avenge the blood of His people, render vengeance to his adversaries, and will make atonement for His land and His people.”

In my family’s story I shall also tell of those who escaped destruction, those who survived because their love for the land of Israel brought them to our country in time, and of those who survived only after they had lived through the inferno of a conquered Europe.

I gathered the family chronicles from various sources. The first source: the stories that my mother, of blessed memory, told me. Before the Bar Mitzvah of her grandchild, David, she acceded to his request and wrote several pages of memoirs. I was also helped by those few family members who escaped extermination, and were willing to recall that awful epoch. I want to take this opportunity of thanking them for being prepared to be reminded... to be exposed... and to give me of their time.

Special thanks are due to Aharon Nachalon, to Lucu Hoffman, to Avraham and Kicsi Nussbächer, to Israel and Mondl Weisz, through whose co-operation entire chapters were written. My dearest husband, Binyamin, sat with me for many an hour to give form to the ideas I wished to express. Thanks to him, my basic Hebrew was transformed into clear and readable material. Words are inadequate to thank him for all his devoted work.

Miriam Sarfatti

Part One

Family Blau

Chapter 1

Memories of the village Hodod

My mother of blessed memory, known as Granny by her grandchildren, had sweet and pleasant memories of her Hungarian village Hodod. As a child she spent her holidays there with Grandfather Jozsef and Grandmother Miriam Blau. Her father, Reb Yitzchak Eizik Blau was born and grew up there.

Hodod was a small village in the district of Salaj, in northern Transylvania.

Transylvania is a spacious stretch of land in central Europe, between Hungary and Romania, and in the course of history it was ruled by one state, and then by another. Today Transylvania is Romanian territory, but during Grandfather Jozsef's days it belonged to Hungary.

General Background to the History of Transylvania

In order to understand what follows, here are a few words regarding the historical background of Transylvania: Transylvania was an integral part of Austria until 1867. In that year the "Austrian Empire" became the "Austro-Hungarian Empire", Transylvania was annexed by Hungary which enjoyed almost complete political independence of the empire. This annexation was in effect for 51 years, until 1918.

After the first World War Transylvania came under the rule of Romania. In 1940, during World War II, in the wake of the Second Vienna Award, enforced by Hitler, northern Transylvania, including all the places in which our family lived, reverted to Hungarian rule. Since 1944 Transylvania has been part of Romanian territory.

The vagaries of history brought into Transylvania Romanians, Hungarians and also German and gypsy minorities, each of whom preserved its own language and customs.

The History of the Jews in Transylvania

In the 18th century there were almost no Jews in Transylvania; in 1750 there were only 110 Jewish families (mostly Sephardi). Towards the end of the century there began a stream of immigration into the area, increasing steadily in the 19th century: in 1787 there were 2,093 Jews in Transylvania; in 1825 – 5,175 Jews. In 1941 Transylvania had a population of about six million of whom close to 200,000 were Jewish. On the eve of World War II there were 10,000 Jews in the Salaj district, and 300,000 non-Jews.

The movement of the Jews to Transylvania stemmed from the Napoleonic wars and the inter-relations between this district and Western Europe. This flourishing area provided agricultural produce for export, and the indigenous nobility who had need of labor and enterprise were grateful for the advent of the Jews. The majority of the first Jews of Transylvania were simple folk, and they settled in the villages because they were not given a foothold in the big towns and cities. (The municipal leaders exploited the royal privileges accorded to them, and prevented the Jews from settling within the areas of their jurisdiction).

With the suppression of the Hungarian rising against Austria in 1848, and the abolition of feudal law (until that time the Hungarian peasants were serfs to the landowners), Hungarian Jews, too, began to have a share in economic expansion. Jews were allowed to lease, and in certain cases to purchase land for agriculture. Usually these were lands belonging to the Hungarian rural aristocracy. This aristocracy gradually declined, and the lease of their lands to enterprising Jews was of mutual benefit. Jews were also allowed to settle in the towns, involving themselves in the trade and industry that was developing with the creation of a railway network. In 1867 the Jews attained full rights, and the last constraints imposed on them fell away.

The waves of Jewish immigrants to Transylvania at the beginning of the 19th century came from the territories of the Hapsburg Empire, and were mainly from Hungary proper. Later, Jewish immigration began from Galicia, in Poland, especially after the removal, in the middle of the 19th century, of restrictions on immigration from non-Hungarian territories.

Family Blau

There was evidence that Family Blau lived in the district of Salaj, in Transylvania, from the beginning of the 19th century. Proof of this is to be found in the registration records of the population which were still in the hands of the religious authority in the 19th century. The registration of the Jewish population was subject to the authority and the responsibility of the community. There were three sets of registration - births, deaths and marriages - and these were entered in Hungarian. In 1896 the civil authorities, the council, took over the registration. These records existed until 1944, but were lost in the Holocaust.

The tradition passed down by Granny has it that the Blau Family emigrated from Russia or Poland to the district of Salaj. Another tradition maintains that before they came to the district of Salaj the family lived in Burgenland, (the area of the “Seven communities”), in Austria, along the Hungarian border.

Grandfather Jozsef

Family Blau took root in Salaj. Like most Jews of that era, Grandfather Jozsef felt part of Hungary which he considered his homeland. He was completely loyal to Hungary, and Hungarian was spoken in his home. (In Hodod most of the non-Jews were Hungarian, and for many of the Jews there Hungarian was the mother tongue).

Moshe Jozsef Blau (Grandfather Jozsef) was born in the middle of the 19th century in a small village called Hodod-Nadasd, to his father Reb Dovid and his mother Chaya Hinda. Until 1916 he lived in the nearby larger village of Hodod. Grandfather Jozsef's two brothers, Izidor and Arye Yehuda, also lived on their estates in Hodod.

The first Jews came to Hodod at the end of the 18th century under the patronage of the local masters, the Barons of Wesselenyi. The barons set up farms to raise pigs, as well as flocks of sheep and herds of cattle for milk produce. They employed the Jews as laborers and as middlemen for the sale of their agricultural produce. As time went on, the Jews leased lands, forest areas and vineyards which they worked independently.

As early as the beginning of the 19th century there was a Jewish community in Hodod, comprising of all the conventional institutions, such as a mikveh [ritual bath], a burial society and a cemetery. Later a synagogue was built. In 1920 there were 128 Jews in Hodod. The small community in the village was served faithfully by a Dayan [Rabbinic adjudicator], and Shochet [a ritual slaughterer]. The Rabbi of Cehul Silvaniei a distance of some 12 kilometers from Hodod, also acted as Rabbi of the village. He would visit the village from time to time, and each year he spent several Sabbaths there.

Grandfather was very well-to-do and lived on a large estate. Grandfather Jozsef would come to Cehul Silvaniei in his fine carriage, drawn by two horses, as befitted his standing. Together with his brother, Izidor, he leased the lands of a wealthy Hungarian nobleman (Count Dagenfeld), and the non-Jewish peasants worked the fields for the brothers Blau. Grandfather Jozsef was also entitled to levy a tax at the annual cattle fair which took place in the village. (In Hodod there was a famous horse fair, and Jewish traders came from far afield to this fair). In addition to these occupations, Grandfather Jozsef kept an inn. This inn was run continuously for 36 years (running an inn was a typically Jewish occupation) by a Jew, whose wife was Grandmother Miriam's housekeeper.

Grandfather Jozsef had about him an aura of nobility and he was highly respected and appreciated. He was sparing of speech, weighing each word. He was a model of integrity and commonsense. Due to his personal standing, his sterling qualities, his wisdom and sheer decency, many came to seek his advice. The non-Jewish villagers saw in him a trusted arbitrator, and came to him for help in their disputes. His decisions were always accepted without demur.

Grandfather Jozsef was very punctilious, and when people saw him returning home for the midday meal, they all knew that it was exactly 12 o'clock. He inculcated this quality in his children and grandchildren. Granny, his granddaughter, was always punctual in her appointments, and all her life continued to serve meals as in her grandfather's, and later in her father's house, at exactly 12 o'clock midday, and at 6 o'clock sharp in the evening.

People collecting for charity always found an open door with Grandfather Jozsef. He donated generously towards the building of the synagogue in the neighboring town, Cehul Silvaniei (which was completed in 1901), and together with another Jew he donated the town's *Beth Midrash* [Talmudic study room]. Delegates from Israel, asking for donations, who came to his door were never turned away empty-handed. Thus, for example, he purchased shares of the Siebenbürgen and Siladi *Kolel* [Higher Talmudic Institute for married Talmudic scholars] in Jerusalem, (Siebenbürgen is the German name for Transylvania; Siladi is Salaj in Rabbinic literature). These shares were a donation towards the *Kolel* buildings in Jerusalem, near the tomb of Shimon the Righteous (which is between the former Mandelbaum Gate - today the Square of the Central Command - and the Sheik Jarrach quarter), and they also gave effective right of residence to any immigrant to the country. To this day there have remained some of the bookkeeping accounts of the period, including the names of about 60 donors from the Salaj district, among them Grandfather Jozsef. (The remaining bookkeeping accounts got lost when the original *Kolel* building was destroyed during the War of Independence. The *Kolel* was rebuilt in the Meah Shearim quarter after the War of Independence). Although Grandfather Jozsef never came to the Holy Land and never exercised his right of residence in the *Kolel*, he always had a warm place in his heart for the Land of Israel. It is also a known fact that Grandfather Jozsef acquired land in the country, but the deeds of purchase were lost.

Grandmother Miriam

Grandmother Miriam, daughter of Gitel and Reb Dovid Shlomo Roth, the devoted wife of Grandfather Jozsef, was born in the Nagy-Szollos district. At that time it was under the rule of Hungary, later it became Sevlyushl in Czochoslovakia, and today the town Vinogradov, in the Ukraine.

Grandmother Miriam was orphaned at an early age. Her father Dovid Shlomo Roth, married three times (after being widowed twice), and he had 21 children. In addition to his own children he adopted several orphans. In an age when immunization and antibiotics were unknown, many of his children died young. Thus, for example, in one year, he lost six children who died of tuberculosis. Of all his children, apparently only three attained old age: Grandmother Miriam, her unmarried stepsister Channah who lived in Budapest, and her brother Yehudah Leib, who lived with his family in Satu Mare (Szatmar).

Grandmother Miriam was well-loved by her children, her daughters-in-law and her grandchildren. Her granddaughter, Granny, was orphaned as a small child, and Grandmother Miriam cared for her as a mother would. Even when her father remarried, Grandmother Miriam continued to lend an ear to Granny's secrets, troubles and joys. With Grandmother Miriam Granny found motherly love and warmth.

Two of Grandmother Miriam's grandchildren, Aharon Nachalon and Granny, called their eldest daughters after her. To this day, more than 50 years after her death, some of her grandchildren commemorate the day of her death (25th Elul 5697 - 1937).

The Descendants of Grandfather Jozsef and Grandmother Miriam

Four children were born to Jozsef and Miriam: the eldest Yitzchak Eizik (Ignacz), Granny's father (my grandfather), was born in 1886; four years later Yettel (Julia) was born, Aharon Nachalon's mother. (In Yiddish, Yettel means "little Jewish girl", so Aharon called his daughter "Judith"; another theory is that the name Yettel comes from the word "Gentilia" or "Gentile" - meaning "lovely", "pleasant"); after another four years Oren Leib (Armin), Lucu's father, was born; and finally they brought into the world a son, whose death of meningitis at the age of three was a cause of deep sorrow to Grandmother Miriam to the end of her days.

Yitzchak Eizik, my grandfather, grew up in an age when most of the young boys in Transylvania were content to go to the *Heder* [primary school for Jewish studies] near their home. The number of *Yeshivoth* [institutes of higher Talmudic learning] were few, and studying there entailed long journeys and considerable expense, so that most of the family heads did not send their children to *Yeshivoth*. Ususally, the young boys went out to work at about the age of 14. Grandfather Jozsef, aware of his son Yitzchak's strong desire to deepen his knowledge in Jewish studies, sent him for a

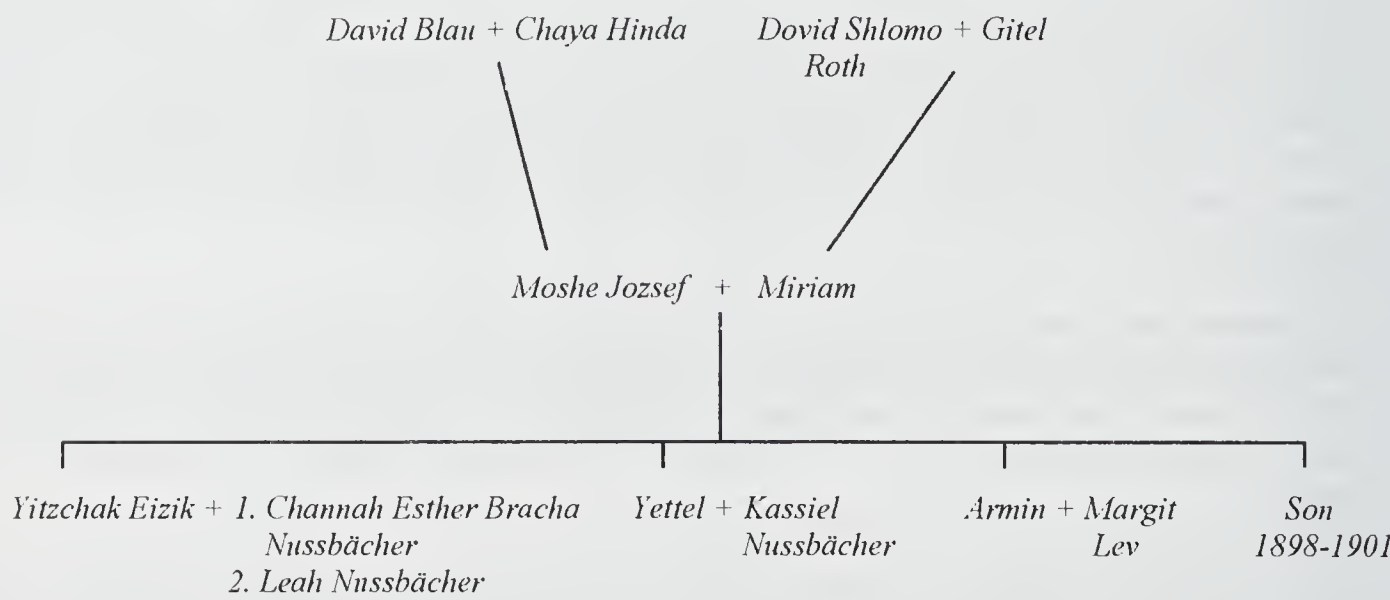
year to the *Yeshivah* in faraway Sighetul Marmatiei. Grandfather Yitzchak learned at the feet of Rabbi Hanania Yomtov Teitelbaum, the author of “Kedushat Yomtov” (the father of the renowned Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, later to become the Szatmar Rebbe.) This year was the basis for the *Gemara* studies that Yitzchak Eizik continued later, day in, day out, to the end of his life, in addition to earning his living.

At the age of 16 (1902), after learning in the *Yeshivah* for one year, Yitzchak Eizik received a handsome sum of money from his father and went to live in Cehul Silvaniei (Szilágycseh). In this town he dealt in the wholesale and retail of wines and strong drink (a sector of trade that was entirely in Jewish hands). He was one of the few merchants in the region who produced wine that was kosher for the Passover, and one of the wholesalers for the famous prune liqueur, Slivovitz, that was produced in the region. Yitzchak Eizik rose to success in business, rapidly.

In the middle of the 19th century Jews began to move from the villages throughout Transylvania to the commercial centres that were developing in the towns. By the end of the 19th century as Cehul Silvaniei, was connected to the national network of railways, (apparently in 1896), it also began to be a source of attraction to Jews from the surrounding villages, thus giving the Jews new trading potential.

In 1906 Yitzchak Eizik married Channah Esther Bracha (Berta) née Nussbächer, from Nasaud. This was the first marriage tie between the families Blau - Nussbächer.

Following this match, Yettel, Yitzchak Eizik's sister, married Esther Bracha's brother Kassiel (Jekuthiel Zvi) Nussbächer. Yitzchak Eizik married Leah, the sister of his wife Esther Bracha, after her death. His brother, Armin Blau married Margit Lev, who was related to the Nussbächer family through her grandmother.



Note: This is only a section of the family tree; for the full Blan family tree see p. 132

Chapter 2

The Town of Cehul Silvaniei

"I left my home town on the 10th of February 1929", Granny began her letter to her grandson, David. On that day Granny bade farewell to the scene of her childhood, but her girlhood experiences in her father's house were imprinted on her memory to her dying day.

At this time the town Cehul Silvaniei (Szilágycseh) numbered about 3,000 non-Jewish inhabitants, mostly Protestant and Catholic, and close on 600 Jews (that is, 100-120 families). The members of the various religions respected each other, and each one adhered to his faith and lived at peace with his neighbors.

Cehul Silvaniei extended lengthwise between two hills covered in vineyards and fields. Thanks to Namenyi Ambrus, the Jewish delegate who represented the Cehul Silvaniei area in the Hungarian Parliament for 30 years (1875-1905), Cehul Silvaniei set up several modern institutions, such as: a law court, a vocational school, a city hall, a smooth pavement, and the first artesian well which provided drinking water for the whole town. It seems that Namenyi also had a share in the building of the town's synagogue.

The "smooth" pavement: the streets in Cehul Silvaniei were paved with uneven stones creating a rough surface full of uneven grooves. It was due to Namenyi that the central square of Cehul Silvaniei was paved with chalkstone, and along the central avenue a "smooth" pavement was made, rather like the smooth pavements of today. The avenue and the pavement served as a meeting place for the youth of the town.

Grandfather Yitzchak's House

On his marriage, Granny's father, Yitzchak Eizik Blau (Grandfather Yitzchak) built a large spacious house in the town for his young family. His business flourished and thus he could afford to build a house that met with his aspirations. Grandfather Yitzchak dreamt of having a large family, and hoped that with time it would grow with married children and grandchildren. With this dream in mind, he furnished his house with a large dining-room that could hold the extended family when they met on Sabbath and on the festivals, in addition to a more modest dining-room for weekdays, as well as a large number of rooms and store-rooms.

In one of the rooms Grandfather Yitzchak built a large *Succah* [Tabernacle], which they called the "fully built" Succah. The Succah was built this way: in the ceiling of the room there was an opening which was kept closed throughout the year. Before the feast of Tabernacles the cover was removed and the opening was covered with thin wooden lathes. Each year Grandfather Yitzchak would try to sleep in the Succah during the festival, and each year the cold and the rain would drive him back into his permanent abode, despite the stove that burned in the Succah.

At the back of the house there was a large balcony along whose entire length there were fragrant lilacs. Beyond the lilac bushes there flourished a spacious garden which extended down the slope of a hill. The garden was terraced and divided into sections; there was a vegetable corner, there was an orchard containing many varieties of fruit trees, and there was a woodland area of pine trees for which grandfather Yitzchak ordered the seedlings from faraway places.

In the yard, close to the cowshed, there was a large cellar, the size of a present-day apartment. The entrance was at ground level, and the cellar itself was a kind of cave in the hill. In those days, without electricity, this cool cellar served as a refrigerator.

The Birth of the Daughters

At first it seemed as though Grandfather Yitzchak’s dream of having a large family was gradually taking shape. The 17th of Teveth 5667 (2nd Jan. 1907) saw the birth of his eldest daughter, Henna Bluma, so named after her maternal grandmother (Nussbächer). At home they called her Blimi, and in Hungarian Ilona. Later, in England, she was called Elena. I called this aunt of mine – Marraine.

Granny was born on the 19th of Iyar 5678 (20th May 1908). When he was called up to the Torah [after her birth], Grandfather Yitzchak called her Hinda Chaya – after his grandmother. Her non-Jewish name, an unusual name in that part of the world, was Alice, after the daughter of the then American president, Theodore Roosevelt, who was visiting Europe at the time, accompanied by his daughter Alice. (Theodore Roosevelt was president from 1901 to 1908, as apposed to Franklin Roosevelt who was president during World War II).

The Death of Esther Bracha

Shortly after Granny’s birth, her mother Esther Bracha became pregnant and fell ill with a malignant disease – cancer of the stomach. Her child, a boy, died before birth. Despite all the doctors’ endeavors, she died on the 18th of Shevat 5670 (28th Jan. 1910), at the age of 24. On the eve of Sabbath when the portion of the Law Jethro was read, Channah Esther Bracha the daughter of Aharon died in the town of Simleul Silvaniei, and there she was buried.

Exactly eighty years later, on the 18th of Shevat 5790, a few days after I began collecting material for this book, I looked for the names of my aunts in some old prayer books. I did not find the names on that same day, but in Granny’s prayer book I found that that same day was the anniversary of the death of my Grandmother Esther Bracha. True, I did not find a kingdom as Saul did, but I saw in this fact a sign that this book is meant to be.

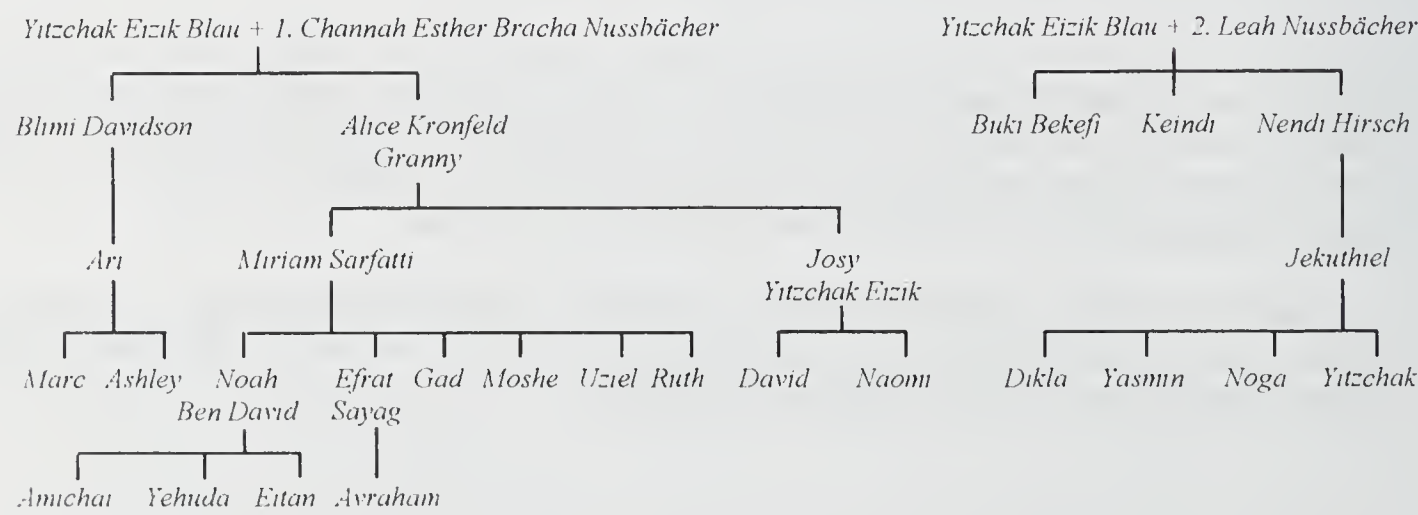
Leah and her daughters

Before her death Grandfather Yitzchak promised his wife that he would immediately marry her sister, Leah (Lenka). At that time Leah was engaged to someone else, whom she really would have wanted to marry; but she broke the engagement, deciding that she would bring up her sister’s children.

Soon after his wife’s death, Grandfather Yitzchak married Leah. On the 12th of Teveth 5672 (2nd Jan. 1912) little Esther Bracha, nicknamed Buki, was born – a birthday present for Blimi, who turned five on the same day. A year later, on the 10th of Teveth 5673 (19th Dec. 1912) Breindel (Varvara), nicknamed Keindi, came into the world. Genendel (Irene) was born on the 19th of Adar 5674 (17th Mar. 1914); everybody called her Nendi. As a result of illness, Leah miscarried - the baby was a boy - and had no more children.

Leah brought up her sister’s daughters exactly like her own daughters, never discriminating between one daughter and another.

The Descendants of Yitzchak Eizik Blau



Life in Grandfather Yitzchak's House

A cook and the maids did the housework. (For educational reasons the girls used to help in the kitchen, each girl having her special day. Granny's turn was on Thursday and she was in charge of baking the cakes for the Sabbath). As the fruit and vegetables in the garden ripened, the maids together with the girls would make preserves, pickles, desserts, jam and marmalade in preparation for the long cold winter. All this was stored in glass jars in a special storeroom for food. Once a month a washerwoman would come to wash all the family's clothes. She would spread out the white laundry on the lawn to bleach in the sun.

The economic situation in the house made for a life of ease. A German governess was brought to give the girls a thorough grounding in German, which was the lingua franca at that time. (German was the official language of Transylvania when the territory was part of the Austrian empire until 1867; after that German remained the language of culture and education).

Water was pumped by hand from Grandfather Yitzchak's private well. Like the water from the neighbors' wells, this was not drinking water, and could only be put to other uses in the house, because the wells, which received their water from the upper layers of the soil, were close to the cowsheds and the stables (or maybe on geological grounds). One of the girls or a maid would fetch drinking water daily from the public fountain (Artesian well) in the town square, which provided good water in plenty.

There was a single cow in the cowshed, to provide dairy produce milked by Jewish hands, so as to avoid any doubts or questions as to its being kosher. For Granny, who didn't like the home-made butter, they used to buy different butter which was kept in a separate container. Looking after the cow and taking her out to graze was the job of a "communal" cowherd. In the summer the cowherd would gather all the cows in Cehul Silvaniei into one herd, by blowing on a trumpet, bringing each cow to her own shed in the evening. In winter the cows would eat hay which was prepared in advance.

Before the Passover, Grandfather Yitzchak used to bake his own *matzot* [unleavened bread] in the *matzah* bakery next to the synagogue; Like all the families in the community, he was allotted one day for this. He was the only one in the family, who was particular, like the Hassidim, not to eat *matzah* soaked in water.

Preparations for the Sabbath were begun on Wednesday with polishing the silver and cutting the girls' nails. On Thursday, Mother or one of the girls, accompanied by a maid, would buy chicken or a goose, and on special occasions, such as for the Purim feast, a turkey, and take it to the *Shochet* to be slaughtered. On Friday at noon they would take the *Cholent* [hot meat and bean dish] to the bakery close by, where the dish would cook in the big oven together with all the neighbors' pots. On the Sabbath, before the meal, the non-Jewish maid would bring home the steaming dish, thus solving the problem of members of the family having to carry on the Sabbath. The maids had but only a few jobs as *Shabbos Goyim* [non-Jews who carry out on the Sabbath actions which Jews are not permitted to perform], including turning off the light and lighting the stove in the winter.

In the orchard, among the raspberry and blackcurrant bushes, the walnut trees, the apple trees and the luscious plum trees, there was a poorer quality plum tree. Grandfather Yitzchak, who was careful to observe the slightest as well as the most serious Mitzvah, refused to pull down that tree, in accordance with the precept of the Torah: "Only a tree which thou knowest that it is not a tree for food, mayest thou destroy". (Deuteronomy, 20, 20). With the passage of years, it was granted to him to fulfil the saying: "One Mitzvah leads to another Mitzvah." Each year a poor family would come and pick the fruit of that tree. In this way Grandfather Yitzchak avoided transgressing the commandment: "Thou shalt not destroy", and gave charity to the poor in a dignified way.

The Cehul Silvaniei Community

Even sixty years after leaving, Granny would proudly refer to the mutual help that prevailed there: "Help for the poor was wonderfully organized. Whoever couldn't afford it, would receive a live chicken or turkey for the Sabbath, depending on the size of the family, as well as wine for *Kiddush* [Sanctification of the Sabbath]. "Before the High Holidays, every poor family would get a cartload

of wood for heating and cooking.

Every family celebration was a celebration for the whole community, and people helped each other in all the preparations. One must remember, there was no ready-to-buy food or banqueting halls.

Most of the families in the town were religious, only a minority were not observant. All the Jews in the town belonged to the orthodox congregation, without any of the rifts or disputes that were prevalent in the neighboring districts as the trend towards the reform movement (the “neolog” or “status quo” stream) became more dominant. In the synagogue in this community prayers were conducted according to the Ashkenazi ritual, the accepted ritual in Transylvania.

Although the Hassidic element in Transylvanian Jewry was continually in the ascent from the middle of the 19th century until the Holocaust years, it continued to be practised only by a minority, even in places exerting a strong Hassidic influence such as Szatmar. The spirit of Hassidism first made itself felt at the time of the first World War, when the wandering heads of Hassidic courts, fleeing the Russian army which invaded Galicia, visited the town. Hassidic refugees who settled in the town were the nucleus on which was founded a small Beth Midrash with a *Minian* [small community] using the Hassidic Sephardi ritual. (It will be recalled, the *Beth Midrash* was donated by Grandfather Jozsef and another Jew). In Cehul Silvaniei there were two Hassidic families who were conspicuous for their distinctive dress. The Hassidim and their followers went over to the *Beth Midrash* and did not impair the unity of the community. The Hassidim, who were in the main affiliated to the Szatmar dynasty, gathered around themselves several prominent scholars of the town, and engaged mainly in learning together, and to a lesser degree in Hassidic customs. It is worth stressing, that in Cehul Silvaniei, even the Hassidim and their followers submitted to the authority of the Rabbi of the community, and set themselves apart only with regard to the ritual of their prayers.

Grandfather Yitzchak belonged to this group and prayed with them on weekdays. On the Sabbath, and certainly on the festivals, when all the family went to the central synagogue, he would join the family at the synagogue. (Once he went to the Szatmar Rebbi for the festival, but the family objected so strongly that he never did so again).

The Synagogue in Cehul Silvaniei

The big beautiful synagogue, the pride and glory of the community, was built with public funds at the end of the 19th century, and was completed shortly before Grandfather Yitzchak moved to Cehul Silvaniei. It was built on the most beautiful site in the town, rising up high at the top of the main street, at the bottom of which there was the public fountain. People say that the land on which the synagogue was built was put at the disposal of the community by a rich non-Jew who was at odds with members of the church.

The first Jews came to Cehul Silvaniei at the end of the 18th century, and from 1830 onwards they gathered regularly for public prayer; they had a burial society and a Mikveh. In 1863 the first Rabbi was elected. As a result of the movement of Jews from the neighboring villages to Cehul Silvaniei, the community continued to grow; the old synagogue became too small, and a new spacious building was erected and dedicated in 1901.

By virtue of his financial support to and his standing in the community, Reb Jozsef Blau, Grandfather Yitzchak's father, was honored with a front seat in the synagogue. Reb Jozsef took care to acquire an equal number of seats in the men's section and in the ladies' gallery, so that all the members of the family had ample room to pray together on the festivals. With the passage of years, the ladies' gallery filled up with the granddaughters, yet the men's section remained almost empty. Grandfather Yitzchak, sitting next to his father, Reb Jozsef, regretted all his life that he had no sons to sit next to him in the synagogue.

Granny's studies

Granny went to the state primary school in Cehul Silvaniei. Twice a week the Rabbi of the community, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Klein, would come to the school and teach the Jewish students basic Torah studies. Rabbi Klein served as Rabbi of the community for more than fifty years and was held in high esteem by Granny and the entire community.

At the age of 12 Granny had to leave the official school system because for girls in the town who were above that age there was only a Christian school, which was unsuitable for the Jewish girls. Together with several of her friends of the same age, (including one of the Rabbi's daughters – her best friend), Granny continued her studies with a private teacher. At the end of the school year the girls would travel to the school in the nearest city for the official examinations. From the age of 15 Granny no longer took the examinations since the authorities deliberately held them on Saturdays.

Granny dreamt of studying medicine, but knew she had no chance of realizing this dream, not only because she had not completed her formal secondary education, but principally because the Romanian authorities imposed severe restrictions on the number of Jewish students in the universities - *numerus clausus*. Those few Jewish students who did make it to the university suffered considerably from anti-Semitism.

There was a piano in the house, and, for their pleasure, Grandfather Yitzchak's daughters learned to play the instrument. It should be mentioned that playing the piano was considered rather "enlightened"; Grandfather Yitzchak agreed that his daughters should play the instrument, although in general he tended to conform to extreme religious view that forbade playing an instrument.

The First World War

When World War I broke out in August 1914, about sixty members of the Cehul Silvaniei community, - numbering not more than a hundred families at the time, – were enlisted. Grandfather Yitzchak was also called up to the army of the Austro-Hungarian kingdom, an ally of the Germans. Grandfather Yitzchak was determined not to participate in battle, because he valued human life above all else, and he was not prepared to kill "enemies of the empire" who were created in the Divine image, and he certainly would not kill Jews in the "enemy" lines. After a short while Grandfather Yitzchak deserted and hid. When the monarchy crumbled, Grandfather returned home and resumed his flourishing business.

The Effects of the First World War on the Jews in Transylvania

After the defeat of Germany and her allies at the end of World War I, (November 1918), and the collapse of their rule, there followed in the spring of 1919, a Communist revolution in Hungary, which lasted 100 days. Concurrently with the Communist seizure of power in Budapest, the Romanian army conquered Transylvania, and thus Hungary forfeited this territory.

In theory, the case of the Jews in Transylvania who now came under Romanian rule was similar to other Romanian citizens – Romanians, Hungarians, Germans and other minorities. In fact, the Jews of Transylvania were subjected to a regime that was characterized by corruption, arbitrariness and unrestrained anti-Semitism. The transition to this regime was arduous for the Jews of Transylvania, all the more so since most of them had no command of Romanian. The cultural and intellectual values of Transylvanian Jewry drew on Hungarian culture and literature, while the older generation was still nurtured on German language and culture. The regime demanded loyalty of the Jews and the severing of all cultural and linguistic ties with Hungary, without granting them personal protection or security in return.

The events of the war and its consequences put an abrupt end to the developing prosperity of Transylvanian Jewry which was at its peak, and which was never to return to its former level; from then onwards there began a regression in the position of Transylvanian Jewry. From a social point of view, too, a change took place in the relations between Jews and non-Jews; after the war there was none of the atmosphere of peace, calm tranquility and mutual respect that had existed in the pre-war years. The Romanian government openly, and even more so, secretly, fostered an atmosphere of deprivation and harassment against the Jews.

Grandfather Yitzchak's Financial Decline

As a result of the political upheavals mentioned above, the Communist revolution and the Romanian occupation, Grandfather Yitzchak lost all his capital. This capital was lost by degrees: a train carrying his merchandise "disappeared" and all the money he had invested in it was lost; because of the change in government all the former markets in Hungary and Galicia were now closed to him, as well as to all the wholesalers for strong drink and liqueur. In addition he was the guarantor for a large sum of money for a friend who also lost his fortune, so that Grandfather Yitzchak had to pay a debt that was not actually his. (For this reason, all her life, Granny never agreed to stand surety for

anyone under any circumstances).

Grandfather Yitzchak gave up dealing in wine almost completely and now made a living as an innkeeper. During the week he would serve drinks to the non-Jews himself, and on the Sabbath a non-Jew would run the business. (The authorities granted a licence to run the inn only on condition that it was open every day of the week). Grandfather Yitzchak suffered considerably from the vulgarities of the drunken non-Jews, and would not let Granny and her sisters enter the inn.

Because of this impoverishment, the household staff was cut down, the cow was sold, and the girls no longer had matching dresses made for them for every holiday. Despite his changed circumstances and notwithstanding his grueling work, Grandfather Yitzchak continued his regular Torah studies at least one hour each day as was his wont.

Grandfather Jozsef moves to Cehul Silvaniei

In 1916, at the height of World War I, Granny's grandfather, Grandfather Jozsef, sold his extensive property in Hodod, wound up all his business there, and came to live in Cehul Silvaniei. (At the end of the war more families left the villages for Cehul Silvaniei. During this period of political change, Jews felt there was more safety in numbers). In Cehul Silvaniei Grandfather Jozsef lived in a large house with a big garden. Close to his house was a complex of buildings including a vast granary to store the wheat in which he dealt, and the inn that was kept by his son Yitzchak.

Grandfather Jozsef's move meant that his granddaughters (Granny and her sisters) had to forego their village adventures, but in return they were near their grandparents. A tradition began of having *Kiddush* [the ceremonial meal] on the Sabbath morning at their grandparents'. Granny, who was very fond of her grandparents, always came with her father to the family *Kiddush*. Uncle Armin, too, who after his marriage in 1921 came to live in the house opposite his brother Yitzchak, used to join the family *Kiddush* together with his wife and daughters: Irene, Lucu and Hedi.

The Cehul Silvaniei community honored Grandfather Jozsef (more than once) with the position of "head of the community". The villagers of Hodod no longer came to put their legal cases before him, but his counsel was highly appreciated. Dezso Blau, the son of his brother Izidor, who was very successful and well-to-do, used to come every Thursday to seek his advice and inform him how his business was going. (Dezso Blau leased Baron Wesselenyi's estate in Hodod and lived in his palace. He would arrive in Cehul Silvaniei in a carriage drawn by four horses and bearing Baron Wesselenyi's coat-of-arms).

Grandfather Jozsef was a hale and hearty man and never fell ill. Long before all the research on correct nutrition, he conquered his appetite; in his youth he would take a glass of Slivovitz every morning and eat meat twice a day, - noon and evening, but in his later years he gave up drinking and ate meat only once a week – on Friday night, and he would not take a second helping even of his favorite dish. Only on Purim did he drink coffee, and on the same occasion smoke a cigar – in memory of the pipe that he had loved in the past and had deliberately discarded.

Grandfather Jozsef's and Uncle Armin's Business

Grandfather Jozsef, too, lost a lot of money because of the political upheavals; for the property that he sold in Hodod he got 380,000 Kronen. As a patriotic Hungarian he invested the entire amount in bonds ("War Loans") issued by the Hungarian government. These documents were not worth a penny after the defeat of Hungary and they were kept in the family safe as a bitter reminder of an age of financial security.

In spite of his losses Grandfather Jozsef still owned a handsome set of shares and with the passage of years he even augmented their value. He was appointed director of the bank with which he had deposited his shares (Korona Bank. Cehul Silvaniei had just two banks). In fulfillment of this position he spent several hours each day in his spacious office in the bank dealing with applications for loans which farmers and businessmen submitted to the bank.

Grandfather Jozsef also became a partner in his son Armin's business dealing in grain, dried fruits and eggs. They used to buy the merchandise from the farmers in the region and sell it abroad (This, too, was a typically Jewish occupation). This work entailed hard physical labor, but despite his advancing years, Grandfather Jozsef had no qualms about hauling the heavy sacks of grain up to the loft.

Uncle Armin, Grandfather Jozsef's younger and favorite son, was also successful in business. In addition to trading in wheat, which, as mentioned before, he did jointly with his father, he supplied paraffin and petrol to the whole region. He owned large petrol tanks and gas stations, all operated manually – in the days before the advent of electricity.

Aunt Yettel

Aunt Yettel, the sister of Grandfather Yitzchak and Uncle Armin, was widowed in 1922 at the age of 33, and was left to take care of two small children, Aharon (Nachalon) and Buki, while expecting another child (Sara – Surika). After the birth of Surika, Aunt Yettel left Szatmar and also came to live in Cehul Silvaniei in her parents' home. Grandfather Jozsef and Grandmother Miriam dwelt once more in the midst of their three children and a spirit of brotherly friendship united the extended family.

Blimi's Marriage

Grandfather Yitzchak did not recover financially, especially after giving his eldest daughter, Blimi, a dowry in keeping with his former position. At the end of 1926 Blimi married Jeno Davidson of the town Beclean near Nasaud.

Granny's Attitude to Israel

Granny was not prepared to enter an arranged marriage (this was the only way of marrying) and so impoverish her father still further (a bride was obliged to provide a dowry, otherwise there was no wedding). To support herself and her family, Granny learned how to sew men's shirts, but no one was prepared to employ a daughter of the highly respected Family Blau! When she realized that she would not find work in that district, she asked her father for permission to emigrate to Israel, but, "of course", her request was refused.

It should be noted that Granny had been active in the Zionist club from the age of 12, and was a subscriber to the Hungarian monthly "Past and Present" (Múlt és Jövő) which described life in Israel; this, at a time when the whole district was decidedly anti-Zionist and followed the ruling of the very influential anti-Zionist rabbis. The rabbis of the communities in the district of Salaj were among the most prominent rabbis of the whole of Transylvania who came out against Zionism. Rabbi Klein of Cehul Silvaniei was not against *Halutzim* [pioneers] settling in Israel, but he was not a Zionist in the accepted sense, and did not influence his congregation in this matter. Up till that time (the late twenties) a total of three young men emigrated to Israel. This gives an idea of Granny's considerable courage in asking her father for permission to go to Israel.

Another, and indeed, the main reason for Grandfather Yitzchak's refusal to let his daughter go to Israel, was the fact that he was a follower of Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum, an extreme anti-Zionist rabbi. (Truth to tell, this same Yoel Teitelbaum, who forbade his followers to emigrate to Israel, was one of those saved in the "Kastner transport". He himself immigrated to the United States, via Israel, whereas all his flock, including his wife and children were sent to Auschwitz). Granny held the Szatmar Rebbe responsible for her immigration to Belgium, and furthermore, for her father being deported to Auschwitz without any means of escape.

On the Way to Belgium

In the summer of 1928 Blimi and Jeno emigrated to Antwerp in Belgium, where they could make a living in diamond cutting. They left their baby, Aharon - Ari (Robert) with his grandparents. Half a year later it was decided that Granny and her sister Buki should join them. Grandfather Yitzchak hoped that in the ultra-orthodox atmosphere of the town the girls would find work and in due course

bring up observant families.

But reality is very complex. At the age of 12 or 13 there occurred a change in Granny's attitude to religious observance as a result of an incident that she witnessed: "One day" Granny writes, "as I was in the shop of a very religious Hassid, the owner of the shop threw out a beggar in a very offensive and insulting manner. My parents taught us not to embarrass anybody, and if we are unable to help a beggar we are obliged to apologize. I returned home in tears, and a week later I ate on a fast day to see what was going to happen. I didn't repeat this behavior again". Granny goes on to say that since then, throughout all the years, she always fasted on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. At the end of her life Granny said that if she had continued to observe the Sabbath, it would have been to some purpose. And so it happened, as it does so often in life, that one single person, that hypocritical Hassid, whose exterior was just a facade, had a greater influence on her than Grandfather Yitzchak who throughout his life lived and acted in accordance with the spirit of the Torah and who was so greatly admired by his daughter. (And I should mention that Granny always praised the town's other Hassidic family whose head was a scholar and an exceptional figure). How much easier it is to destroy than to build up!

On the 10th of February, Granny, aged 21, and her 17-year-old sister Buki and eighteen month old Ari (the son of their sister Blimi), left Cehul Silvaniei for Belgium. The journey by train was arduous and took several days. Apart from the hardships of the journey, Granny had the weight of the responsibility for the infant that was put in her care.

There were hitches due to the weather and the train they were traveling in was delayed, so that they missed their train connection at the transit station (Basle). At the crowded and frightening station the three of them had to wait a long time for the train that would take them to Belgium. After two sleepless days in a an overcrowded third class compartment, Granny asked Buki to look after the baby so that she could take a little rest. After a short nap Granny woke up and was startled to discover little Ari lying underneath Buki who was herself exhausted, and was half asphyxiated. Only after they reached Antwerp in Belgium and Ari had been handed over to his parents, did Granny allow herself to fall asleep again.

The ordeals of the journey were a portent for worse to come.

Granny and her sisters were the first members of the extended family to leave their family and travel afar. It was a step which caused great pain to all but it was inevitable in light of the difficult financial situation with no prospect of any future in Cehul Silvaniei. It should be mentioned that the change of rule at the end of World War I brought about a serious economic crisis for many families in Cehul Silvaniei, and the number of Jewish families there dwindled. Some settled in the large cities, others sought their fortune in faraway places. (In 1920 there were 599 Jews in the town, while in 1941 only 531 remained).

For Grandmother Miriam family unity was of paramount importance, and she suffered greatly when her granddaughters emigrated to a distant place. Later, when her younger son, Uncle Armin, was caught up in Zionist ideals and became one of the Zionist leaders in the town, he wasn't capable of going to Israel because it involved leaving the family.

Chapter 3

The Holocaust in Cehul Silvaniei

Northern Transylvania returns to Hungarian Rule

At the end of August 1940, in accordance with the “Second Vienna Award”, Hitler ordered the return of Northern Transylvania to Hungarian rule. (It will be remembered that in the spring of 1919 the Romanian army conquered Transylvania from the Hungarians). Thus Salaj County returned to Hungarian rule. Grandfather Jozsef and many Jews like him, remembering the good old days of Hungarian benevolence, days when they enjoyed equal rights and business prospered, were very happy to become part of Hungary again.

But the days of tranquility were gone, never to return. The attitude of the Hungarians towards the Jews changed completely from what it had been until 1919. The Jews who returned to Hungarian rule were to feel this change all too sorely. The day the Hungarian soldiers reached Cehul Silvaniei they beat a Jew to death as he was going to the synagogue for morning prayers.

A number of factors combined to bring about this change in attitude on the part of the Hungarians towards the Jews. In the spring of 1919 there was a Communist revolution headed by Bela Kun, a Jew. The Communists held power for a hundred days, and they inflicted terror on the population, going so far as to put to death any opponents. In August of that year the revolution was suppressed and a rightist anti-Semitic regime headed by Admiral Miklos Horthy seized power in Hungary. For most of the population the fall of Communism meant relief from a nightmare, but for the Jews it opened a period of terror worse than the first. The “Red Terror” (Communism) was replaced by the “White Terror” (rightist): army units operated with the aim of cleansing Hungary of Communism, and since Bela Kun himself and many of his associates were Jews, the entire congregation was held to account for their wrongdoing. The “white” troops moved from place to place, and whoever was suspected of siding with the Communists – and suspicion fell on the Jews almost as a matter of course – was executed without a trial. The behavior of the troops “set an example” for the local population, and many of the communities suffered from bloody riots. For more than a year (until the beginning of 1921) these military units carried out pogroms against the Jews on the charge that they were Communists, attacking tens of communities and killing about 3,000 Jews. Ever since, in the Hungarian consciousness Jews are Communists (Jew = Communist).

The change in the economic situation in Hungary was an additional contributing factor to Hungarian anti-Semitism: whereas before World War I the Jews were considered to be a positive element in Hungary’s developing prosperity, after the war – because of the economic straits brought about by the military defeat and the ensuing crisis of 1929 – the Hungarians claimed that the Jews had usurped their positions. There were also political changes, and the power of extremist national pro-Fascist anti-Semitic elements increased, displacing the traditional and relatively moderate conservative establishment.

As a result of the change in attitude to the Jews on the part of the Hungarians, a series of “Jewish Laws” (this was the name given to the laws passed against the Jews) was enacted from 1938 onwards. In 1940, as the Hungarian army entered Northern Transylvania, the “Jewish Laws” were enforced against the Jews of Northern Transylvania as well, and anti-Semitism became even more rife than during the period of Romanian rule. The Hungarians did not stop at legislation, they collaborated with the Nazi oppressor in the physical extermination of the Jews. Thus it came about that most of the Jews of Northern Transylvania were deported and exterminated, while the Jews of Southern Transylvania, who remained under Romanian rule, suffered considerably less than their brethren in the north.

Romania was a party to the murder of 185,000 Ukrainian Jews after having occupied in 1941 (together with Germany) that part of Transnistria that was in the West of the Ukraine. Romania was also responsible in 1941 and 1942 for the deportation to Transnistria of 150,000 Jews who were under Romanian rule, and as a result 90,000 of the deportees perished – from cold, from hunger and from disease. However, from the autumn of 1942

onwards the Romanian government changed its policy, and although the Romanians imposed severe fiscal decrees on the Jews, they did not hand them over to the Germans and the majority of Romanian Jewry were saved.

Aggression against the Jews

One of the severest decrees by the Hungarian authorities was the order promulgated in 1940, according to which every Jew had to prove that he had occupied his place of residence for three generations, as a condition for receiving Hungarian citizenship. For those, like Family Blau who, had lived in the region from days of old, submitting this proof was relatively simple. In Transylvania, it will be remembered, population records were kept systematically: until 1896 by the religious authorities (the Rabbinate and the church), and subsequently by the civil authorities. On the other hand, Jews who had migrated to the region from Galicia after World War I or even earlier, and refugees who had fled from Germany, Austria, Slovakia and Poland in 1938 and 1939 could not comply with the demands of this order. About 20,000 such Jews were deported from Hungarian territory across the Polish border, and in the autumn of 1941 they were murdered by soldiers of the SS and the Hungarian army.

Another measure taken against the Jews was the deportation of the men to “forced labor”. Between 1940 and 1944 tens of thousands of Jewish men were enrolled in “labor service divisions” as an auxiliary force in the Hungarian army, and were employed in various types of forced labor that the army was interested in. Their families remained without their breadwinner, and filled with worry and fear for their dear ones. (In chapter 16 - “Israel Weisz is called up for Forced Labor”, we shall describe in detail the forced labor system in the service of the Hungarian army).

The “Jewish Laws” deprived many Jews of their source of income. Thus, for example, it was forbidden to employ Jews in government posts, and within a short period all those Jews who held such posts were dismissed; factories under Jewish ownership were nationalized; shopkeepers had their licenses withdrawn and they were compelled to take Hungarians into partnership. “Popular” anti-Semitism also increased. The police would conduct frequent searches in Jewish homes and if they found foodstuffs (which were rationed), then the household members were liable to punishment or even deportation. Innocent Jews were imprisoned and sent to the Ukraine to the labor divisions. At times Jews were thrown from trains by gangs of anti-Semites who came their way. In the markets one heard anti-Semitic remarks such as: “The Jews are buying up everything, and because of them we can’t get anything.” In the streets the Hungarians would mock the Jews, as though they no longer recognized their longstanding neighbors.

Nor were the Jews of Cehul Silvaniei spared the hatred of the Hungarians. The fact that most of the population of Cehul Silvaniei was Hungarian, was a blow to the Jews there. Within a short time the Hungarians, who had resumed power, began to harass the Jews by various means. First and foremost, they began to set their eyes on Jewish property and trade and industry that was in Jewish hands. In the wake of reports by the inhabitants and acts of revenge, many Jews in the town were dispossessed of their employment and source of income. Craftsmen and merchants forfeited their permits to acquire raw materials and merchandise (which were rationed by government orders).

The Sufferings of Family Blau

Grandfather Yitzhak lost his license to run the inn, and began trading in grain: he would buy wheat and sell flour. In no time at all this business was also forceably closed down, and Grandfather Yitzhak had to make do with the little money that Granny was able to send him from Belgium. (It was only after the war that Granny found out that at this time she was the sole provider for her parents, and how grateful her step-mother Leah was to her for this).

Uncle Armin (Grandfather Yitzhak’s brother and Lucu’s father) was forced to take a “partner” into his business, a non-Jewish silent partner, who for a princely sum of money lent his name to the business. In this way, Uncle Armin was able to continue his business activities until 1944. (After the deportation of the Jews, this non-Jew treated the business as his own, and at the end of the war he gave an empty kitty back to Lucu).

My great-grandfather Jozsef Blau, was not only a proud Jew, but also a patriotic Hungarian (like most of the community), and he was unable to comprehend the anti-Semitic behavior of the Hungarians. His whole world came to an end. It was at this time that he expressed his pent-up feelings about his

late wife, Miriam: "It's a good thing that Grandmother has already passed away", he said, "and doesn't have to see what is happening".

The Nazi Occupation of Hungary

From 1940 Hungary was an ally of Germany and the other "Axis powers", but still maintained her independence. All the time that Hungary was independent, she did indeed pass anti-Jewish laws which made their lives extremely difficult, but she still let the Jews live. Hungary adamantly opposed Germany's demand to deport the Jews from her territory, - and she had good reason to act as she did. The expulsion of the Jews would have brought about financial and commercial collapse: 18,000 out of 30,000 businesses in Budapest were in Jewish hands; 40,000 out of 110,000 Hungarian companies had Jewish directors, and these brought into Hungary most of the foreign currency; two thirds of the doctors were Jewish. As a result of this, the Jewish community in Hungary was in 1944 the only one in Nazi Europe that suffered almost no loss of life.

The beginning of the end started on March 19th 1944 with the entry of the Germans into Hungary. (The Germans "entered" Hungary, they did not "conquer"; the seizure of power in Hungary was effected without a shot being fired). On the day that the German army entered Hungary, "Eichmann's Commando" (Einsatzkommando Ungarn) reached Budapest - a body of 35 Nazi SS officers, well-trained in the extermination of Jews. Under the command of Adolf Eichmann, who arrived two days later, they organized the deportation of Hungary's 800,000 Jews. For the actual execution of the deportation, Eichmann relied, and with good reason, on the collaboration of the Hungarian people in general, and the assistance of Hungarian Nazis in particular. Immediately after the invasion, these Nazis were appointed to key positions in the government and the military police force.

From the second half of March onwards, the lives of the Hungarian Jews became a veritable nightmare. Draconian laws against the Jews were promulgated one after the other: ration cards were withheld from them; they had to wear the Star of David the size of a fist made of yellow material - "the yellow star"; they were forbidden to travel from place to place; anti-Semitic propaganda on the radio and in newspapers were intensified. The local youth was inculcated with jeering songs insulting the Jews; libels were trumped up non-stop, and old libels (from the crucifixion of Jesus to the blood libels) were revived; finally all Jews were outlawed. Government and public institutions no longer recognized the Jews as citizens and all that remained was to herd them all together in ghettos and send them to the death camps in Poland.

Concurrently with anti-Jewish decrees, the Germans threatened the local population with severe penalties if they allowed themselves to protect the Jews or their property. Anybody caught helping the Jews, would be flogged or even hanged in the public square. However, "upright" citizens reporting such misdemeanors were promised big rewards.

The Deportation from Cehul Silvaniei

The massing of all the Jews of Northern Transylvania in ghettos began on May 3rd 1944. The assignment was completed within a week, and 150,000 Jews were incarcerated in 12 ghettos.

On May 5th 1944 (according to Lucu; other sources say May 3rd) the Jews of Cehul Silvaniei were forbidden to leave their homes. Every family packed a few belongings and a little food and waited for the Hungarian gendarmes (militia with police duties) to come and "collect" them. The gendarmes moved from street to street and "collected" the Jews according to a list compiled by a representative of the local council. Some were allowed to take the parcels they had prepared, others were not - all according to the whims of the gendarmes

Carts that had been requisitioned from the non-Jews took the Jews, in the rain, to the railway station. Old neighbors watched what was going on, laughing and merrily chanting defamatory ditties. Auxiliary forces of the cadet corps - (Levente) - supervised the "movement" of the Jews being deported. All valuables, including wedding rings, were taken from the deportees, despite an order to let them be kept.

At the railway station, where Jews from the neighboring villages had been rounded up, there reigned an atmosphere of terrified confusion and despair. The Jews had no idea where they were going to be sent. After a prolonged wait they were crowded into foul-smelling coaches intended for the transport of cattle, 70 people to a coach. Every coach-load was given six loaves of bread. Here and there a few non-Jews tried to help the Jews but the gendarmes chased them away or tried to force them up into the coaches as well.

In Cehul Silvaniei 550 people were put on the train; they included Family Blau: my great-grandfather Jozsef, Grandfather Yitzhak and his wife Leah, his brother Armin and his wife Margit and their three daughters Irene, Lucu and Hedi. Dezso (Dovid) Blau, a relative from Hodod, and his family were also among those who were made to join those on this train. (Dezso's financial situation had deteriorated as early as 1940, when the Hungarian regime restricted the activities of Jews on the farms and he was forced to leave the estate that he had leased from Baron Wesselenyi. Dezso was beaten to death in Dornau on April 29th 1945. His wife Marika, and their children, Agi, aged 11 and Miklos (Yitzhak Shemuel) aged 9 were murdered in Auschwitz. Only their eldest daughter, Edith, returned from the camps and emigrated to Israel).

The train left Cehul Silvaniei at 11 o'clock at night. It stopped at intermediate stations to pick up Jews from the places it passed. At Jibou the train was held for almost a whole day because of air raids. The Jews were taken to the Salaj district ghetto which was set up on the outskirts of the city Simleul Silvaniei. The 70 kilometer journey took two days.

The Simleul Silvaniei Ghetto

A Gestapo officer and one soldier, the grand total of two Germans came to Simleul Silvaniei to set up the ghetto, but this was more than enough to arrange the deportation of more than 8,000 Jews from County Salaj!!! The whole thing was made possible thanks to the authorities, the police force, the gendarmes, the cadet force, and the Hungarians in general enthusiastically and with great relish assisted in carrying out the "final solution".

The Simleul Silvaniei ghetto was put up in a brickyard near the village of Cehei, about 6 km away from the town of Simleul Silvaniei. The location of the ghetto was carefully chosen, like all the other ghettos in Transylvania, in a deserted area outside the town. The Hungarians, who were responsible for rounding up the Jews until they were handed over to the Nazis, mostly preferred brickyards which were sometimes half ruined.

The brickyard in Simleul Silvaniei included a large courtyard and buildings where the bricks were dried out and fired. The buildings were planned to be open to the winds as much as possible, since they served to dry out the bricks. The incinerators were also open to a height of 3-4 meters. As it is still rainy and windy in this region at this time of the year (May), the Jews, who were housed in these open buildings, suffered from the cold and the wet. At the entrance to the factory there were several small buildings, and store rooms. These buildings were now used as the ghetto offices, as headquarters of the gendarmerie, as the staff kitchen, and for food storage. One of the buildings was turned into a hospital.

The Jews of Simleul Silvaniei, who were the first to reach the ghetto area, crowded into the buildings and into the incinerators. Among these was Aunt Netti, the sister of my grandmother Esther Bracha, a resident of Simleul Silvaniei. The Jews who reached the ghetto during the following days did not always find room in the buildings, and thousands of them remained in the open area - the wide space outside the factory - exposed to the cold, the rain and the wind. The poor souls tried to build some sort of huts out of pieces of wood and boards that they found round about. There were some who put up improvised tents out of a praying shawl and blankets. They slept on the muddy ground with neither beds or mattresses.

Interrogations and torture in the Simleul Silvaniei Ghetto

As soon as the ghetto was set up, the secret police of the "unit for the investigation of fiscal crimes" went into action. Using brutal torture, they began interrogations, with a view to discovering where the Jews had hidden their money and other valuables before they started out. Such investigations were carried out in all the ghettos in Transylvania, and about 30% of the men and 10% of the women were questioned and tortured. Those who owned property, town dwellers and villagers alike were summoned into an interrogation office, which became a torture chamber. Some were tortured to death. The forms of torture included forcing them to drink buckets of vinegar mixed with water, lashing the soles of their feet, searching men and women after stripping them naked. (Even before the ghetto was set up, every Jew had to hand in any valuables in his possession to the national bank. Most of them obeyed the order. Nevertheless, many of them were tortured, although they had nothing to admit).

My great-grandfather, Jozsef Blau, aged 87, had to undergo such questioning to make him tell them where the key to his safe in the bank was. It was to no avail as the safe was empty, the money having all gone long before!

In retrospect, it turned out that the Simleul Silvaniei ghetto was one of the cruelest in the country. Whereas in other places barbaric acts were perpetrated to find hidden valuables, in the Simleul Silvaniei ghetto Jews were tortured to no purpose whatsoever. The commander of the Simleul Silvaniei ghetto (and the district governor) the Hungarian Laszlo Krasznai, bullied his victims simply to satisfy his perverse sadistic instincts. He would tear into the ghetto on horseback knocking down the Jews' makeshift tents over their heads. On his own initiative, he prohibited prayers and confiscated objects of synagogue worship, such as: prayer books, prayer shawls, and *tephillin* [phylacteries]. Once he "caught" the Rabbi of Simleul Silvaniei, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich, wearing his praying shawl and praying. The savage fellow ordered the Rabbi to be strung up on a tree so that only his big toes touched the ground; when he was set free, he collapsed unconscious. Anyone caught putting on *tephillin* had the "privilege" of receiving similar treatment. He ordered bearded men with sidelocks to shave. Rabbi Ehrenreich did not obey this order either. Krasznai went from building to building, and from tent to tent to check whether the Jews had obeyed his command. At the beginning of the Sabbath, the 81-year-old Rabbi was brutally shorn of his beard. (And as if this were not enough, the manuscript of one of his works, over which he had labored for 50 years, was burnt before his very eyes).

Daily food in the ghetto

A central kitchen was set up in the ghetto to provide cooked food. The prisoners in the camp received a plate of hot soup and a small amount of black bread every day. Families who decided to do without soup were given one or two potatoes and an onion, so they could cook their own soup over a fire with the few provisions they had brought with them. Many chose this second possibility, because in this way, by adding water, they could prepare a larger amount of soup than was given out to them. Many were generous enough to share the little food they had with those who had not been allowed to bring any food from home. But this supply of food gave out after a few days, and hunger set in.

As for drinking water in the ghetto, the situation was terrible. In the middle of the camp there was a well next to which was a trench that was filled with water (used for wetting the bricks). The ghetto inmates took their drinking water from this trench, and a day or two later they all suffered from severe diarrhea; more than twenty people died after drinking this water. The Jewish doctors drew the attention of the Hungarian doctor in charge to the fact that the water was contaminated, but nothing was done to remedy the situation. (In the ghetto there was another well, for the use of the guards alone). From the Simleul Silvaniei ghetto starving people, in poor health were sent to Auschwitz. For many of them this meant immediate death in the gas chambers.

Guarding the ghetto

A small group of 20-30 Hungarian policemen from Simleul Silvaniei with the aid of Jewish "auxiliary police" were in charge of maintaining order. Outside the ghetto there was a unit of gendarmes from Budapest, numbering altogether 50-60 men, who kept watch from a distance on what went on in the ghetto. According to one of the witnesses, only one single gendarme kept watch on each side of the ghetto. Krasznai and his assistants encouraged the gendarmes, who were extremely cruel, to take part in harassing the miserable Jews in the ghetto.

Many of the young people talked of escaping from the ghetto but most of them did not dare take the risk. There were those who did not want to leave their families open to unpredictable dangers. In the end there were a few isolated instances of attempts to escape, and even fewer successes. Thus, for example, a group of young people escaped to the forest near the ghetto, but the local people were quick to pass on the word to the gendarmes, and only one of the group managed to escape alive. Another group fared better: one youth managed to escape and reach his parents' farm and hide there with the help of their faithful steward. He was followed by four more young men who fled to the farm. It should be mentioned that not one of them could stay on the farm or in the region for long for fear of informers, and they had to continue their escape to less hostile places.

Most of the ghetto inmates did not imagine that their end was close. They, and Family Blau among them, believed rumors that there were plans to move the ghetto inmates into Hungary itself; the young people would go to work while the older people would look after the children. No one wanted to recognize the facts for what they were, and no one was aware of the signs that foreboded the end, such as deliberate starvation, bullying and degradation, the fact that those doing forced labor who came to visit their families in the ghetto were not allowed to return to their units. True, they too heard reports brought by refugees from Poland about the mass destruction of the Jews; they heard, but did not want to believe. Moreover, the Jews drew encouragement from the Russian gains in the war and anticipated the defeat of the Germans. (Indeed, within less than half a year, in October 1944, Transylvania was liberated). They also heard of the Allies' plans to land in Western Europe. (In fact, on June 6th 1944, as the last of the Jews of the Simleul Silvaniei ghetto were being put on the train to Auschwitz, the British and the Americans landed on the beaches of Normandy in France).

The journey to an unknown destination

8,000 people were in the ghetto for about a month under terrible conditions. The deportees did not imagine that this was the more bearable part of their sufferings. On the second day of the feast of Shavuot 5704 [Pentecost 1944], the oppressors began to evacuate the ghetto. Within a couple of days all the Jews were sent in three transports to an unknown destination. My great-grandfather Jozsef was deported in the second transport, on the 12th of Sivan (3rd June). 3,161 Jews were deported in that train. Together with him in the same coach was his son Yitzliak Eizik and his wife, and his son Armin and his wife and their daughters Irene, Lucu and Hedi.

Before putting the Jews on the train the gendarmes again searched them for gold and jewelry, beating and torturing them. They shoved 70-100 people into the coaches which were labeled as being intended for 8 horses or 40 persons. Two of the four windows in the coach were boarded up, and the other two were barred with barbed wire. When the train reached Kosice, the frontier town on the Hungarian-Slovak border, where the Jews were handed over from the Hungarians to the Germans, the Hungarians carried out another search on every prisoner in the hope of finding concealed treasure.

The conditions on the train journey were sub-human; there was terrible overcrowding, the heat was unbearable, and there was lack of air, food and water in the coaches. There was nothing to drink at all, and the only food was the little they had brought with them from the ghetto. After three terrible days in the train, dazed through lack of air, hungry, thirsty and tired, they finally arrived at their destination – Auschwitz.

Auschwitz

To this day the endless yelling and screaming that “welcomed” them in Auschwitz continue to ring in Lucu’s ears. The yelling was to hurry the miserable wretches in the train as they were getting off the coaches. On the platform there took place the first encounter with prisoners of the camp wearing striped clothes, “pajamas”. Some of those on the platform wearing pajamas were Jews wearing the Yellow Star, others were non-Jewish criminals who had a green triangle sewn to their clothing. The latter were there to “preserve order” on the platform; they were equipped with bars, and were busy separating the men from the women.

The next and “inevitable” stage was the selection carried out by the notorious Mengele and his aides. As she was standing on the platform in the row of women, Lucu, unnoticed and in the twinkling of an eye, was sent to the right, together with her two sisters, Irene and Hedi. They began to march in the rain in the direction they were told. Not one of them realized, or wanted to realize, that she was being separated from her parents forever more.

The destruction of the family

On that same day my great-grandfather Moshe Jozsef Blau aged 87, my grandfather Yitzhak Eizik Blau aged 58 and his wife Leah aged 54, uncle Armin Blau aged 50 and his wife Margit aged 42, and with them many Jews from Cehul Silvaniei were murdered in the gas chambers and burned in the incinerators at Auschwitz.

The date of the extermination of the family is known to us almost exactly. Granny believed that it was on the 13th of Sivan 5704 (4th June 1944); according to Granny's sister, Nendi, it was the 14th of Sivan. Researchers (Judah Schwarz and Randolph Braham), are of the opinion that the second transport left Simleul Silvaniei on the 12th of Sivan, and since the journey took three days, the fatal day was the 15th of Sivan.

Chapter 4

In the Camps

Life in Auschwitz

Hedi who was 16, 19-year-old Lucu and 20-year-old Irene went through the selection and were granted their lives, but a great deal of suffering still awaited them. They were put into a tumbledown hut that leaked and was crowded full of bewildered women. The first thing Lucu did was to fill her hands with the water that dripped through the leaking roof to quench her thirst somewhat. Hundreds of her equally miserable comrades did the same.

There were no sleeping arrangements whatsoever in the hut. The girls sat on the muddy floor and fell asleep sitting up for want of space to lie down because of the crowded conditions. They also ate in a revolting manner, like animals. The large pot of soup was passed from one woman to the next, and they all ate from the same ladle. After two or three days under these conditions, Lucu became terribly ill with diarrhea.

Lucu spent five days in Auschwitz. Each day there was one identification parade (Appell) after another, during which they had to stand to attention endlessly in the wind and the rain. On the fifth day, with an identity number tattooed on her arm, and unconscious from the dysentery she was suffering from, Lucu was taken from Auschwitz. She was saved thanks to her sisters who carried her all the way to the train.

The Kaiserwald labor camp

From the death camp Auschwitz, which “merely” served as a transit camp for selection purposes, the girls were moved to Riga in Latvia, the labor camp in Kaiserwald. The physical condition in the huts in this camp were better than in Auschwitz. The prisoners slept on wooden racks, there was a shower, and each one received a bowl and a wooden spoon. The girls became indifferent to their own repugnance; they just waited for the thin soup in order to satiate, if only a little, their hunger. Order in the camp was under the responsibility of German or Polish non-Jewish women who were ruthless and sexually perverted.

The women worked in shifts in the big plant for electrical products, A.E.G.; one week of daytime shifts, and one week of nightshifts. The nightshift was particularly arduous. They were set to work taking old batteries apart and sorting the parts for recycling. The zinc powder that was released in this work penetrated their bodies causing irritation and extreme discomfort. For months after leaving Kaiserwald their skin was still stained black from the zinc powder.

Hedi, the youngest sister, caught scarlet fever, and was moved to the hut for the sick. After recovering she was supposed to remain in quarantine for another six weeks to prevent the spread of the disease. At this time the Russians carried out heavy bombing over the area, and the Germans began to evacuate the labor camp. All the inmates of the hut for the sick were sent to be exterminated, no one knows to where. Hedi had not yet reached the age of 17 when she died.

On the way to Danzig

The evacuation of the camp in Kaiserwald continued. A group of women was sent to their death in a boat that was sunk by the Germans in the Baltic Sea (on the way to Danzig, now Gdansk in Poland).

Lucu and Irene began their train journey which was frequently interrupted because of the bombing. They continued their journey in a small boat, and finally, for several days, in a warship called

“Bremerhaven”. The women were convinced that their last hour had come and that the Germans were going to sink the ship. The overcrowding in the vessel was unbearable; ten women shared one wooden rack. It was impossible to move, and whoever tried to, was beaten by the SS soldiers guarding them. At the end of the journey, to everyone’s surprise they got a slice of meat the size of their hands. (It later turned out that this was horsemeat).

Stutthof concentration camp

At the end of August (or maybe the end of September) 1944 they reached their destination: a camp near the village of Stutthof on the coast of the Baltic Sea, in the bay of Danzig. They stayed in this camp for about a week.; a week that seemed eternity, a week of continual torture. Again there were endless identification parades, again terrible cruelty and beatings right and left. Even going to the toilets was accompanied by awful beatings. Again there were women guards with strange perversions. The girls did not work, so there was time for yet another and yet another identification parade, where sometimes ice cold water was thrown on the prisoners.

In the camp at Stutthof, Lucu and Irene met a group of women from Cehul Silvaniei, who seemed much healthier because they had been in a camp with better conditions than Kaiserwald. Lucu and Irene thought of joining this group by changing huts with some other girls, but they were forced to leave Stutthof before they could put their plans into action. (Of the group of women from Cehul Silvaniei not one returned!)

The camp at Dorbeck

From Stutthof the girls were moved to a camp near the village of Dorbeck, also on the coast, about 20 km from Stutthof.

Winter began, a northern winter. The cold was terrible; 30 degrees below zero. The women were housed in a tent of thin material that did not protect them from the cold and the wind. They slept on the ice-covered ground, without blankets, wearing only their clothes (if the few rags that covered them can be called clothes: when they reached Dorbeck the gray skirts and the striped coats they got in Auschwitz were replaced with rags in the form of thin tattered dresses). Most of the prisoners had no shoes: some had wooden clogs, others would wrap pieces of paper or rags round their feet, and there were also some who were completely barefoot. Their feet froze and women froze to death. Lucu and Irene had very small feet (size 35), and their leather boots did not fit any of the women overseers, the “*kapos*” and so they kept their shoes.

The sanitary conditions were horrifying. Since leaving the camp in Stutthof they had no water to wash with so they used snow. Once they broke the layer of ice and used the water underneath. Neither were there any toilets, and very soon all the girls had dysentery.

Digging fortifications in Dorbeck and Gutttau

In Dorbeck the women had to dig trenches and bunkers along the sea coast to a depth of six meters, as a defense posts for tanks and soldiers. A huge (and very heavy) hammer and a spade were the only tools they had at their disposal. Working in relays, these poor tortured women hauled frozen earth, huge stones and ice out of the trenches that they dug. They built a defense line that stretched many kilometers along the coast.

The place was hell on earth. If hard labor, filth and cold wasn’t enough, the place was swarming with lice. Millions of lice. The thin tattered rags they got as clothes were infested with lice. This was the body louse which feeds on human blood and causes severe irritation. As a result there was an epidemic of typhus which took its toll of many victims. Lucu also fell ill but was forced to continue working.

When the fortifications in Dorbeck were completed the women were moved to a camp near the village of Gutttau, 30 km north of Dorbeck. In Gutttau the women continued the same hard labor of building trenches and fortifications along the coast.

The light at the end of the tunnel

The beginning of January 1945. The bitter cold froze everything and the prisoners went on dying like flies. The Russian bombing continued non-stop, the (Russian) front came ever nearer, and the Germans prepared to retreat. As a first stage in the retreat the Germans decided to evacuate the camp. They ordered the healthy women, including Irene, to begin marching to the railway station; Lucu and 40 other sick women, lying one on top of another, were taken there on a horse drawn cart. The Germans took care to take the sick women as well so as not to leave behind them evidence of their dastardly deeds.

In the meantime the railway was bombed and could not be used. All the women were taken back to the camp to do hard labor. Lucu was the only one left alive out of those on the “sick cart”. With the help of Irene and several other girls who protected her, Lucu, too, returned to work – the only possibility of staying alive.

After several days marching orders were given again, but this time not to the railway station but further afield – the death march. The Russians were drawing near and the Germans drove the women on to march. Any woman not marching to order, got a bullet in her head; or alternatively, the poor woman was beaten with a rifle butt – a blow that was enough to kill – thus also saving ammunition.

The convoy stopped for the night at a large farm, and the prisoners were put into a barn. On the other side of the door the girls could hear the Germans arguing among themselves: there was a suggestion to set the building on fire, prisoners and all, but one of the Germans said that they would be taken prisoner immediately by the Russians and who knows what fate was in store for them. The result – all the guards fled. The women did not have time to make plans, when suddenly a single German officer appeared. The officer phoned to some place, but didn't wait for reinforcements and he, too, fled.

The women on the farm heard the ceaseless blast of explosions. It turned out that the farm was in the middle of a battlefield. They saw the movement of armed forces, saw how the surrounding hills passed from one side to the other and how soldiers were being wounded and killed.

The Liberation

On January 21st 1945, at 11 o'clock in the morning Russian soldiers entered the farm. At the entrance to the barn one of the women joyfully embraced the first soldier that came in. (At that time they had no idea how much they were destined to fear the Russian soldiers and to flee before them.) The women, about 20–30 were freed.

The town Neumark (now Nowe Miasto in Poland) was the first place that the women reached on being liberated. They came upon the terrible spectacle of a town that had been bombed: corpses everywhere, shops that had been broken into. The women took no part in the looting of the shops that prevailed throughout the town. All that these miserable beings dreamt of was a cup of hot tea and a potato.

The women came to the school in the town, and still caught sight of the pro-Nazi principal making off. The principal's apartment had not been damaged. Crystal chandeliers, carpets, fine furniture, everything was untouched in its place. In tatters, infested with lice, sick, weak and hungry, the girls settled in the luxury apartment. Lucu exchanged her loathesome wooden bowl for an exquisite crystal plate. For the first time after many months they at last had water to remove the filth that clung to them from the time they had dug the trenches.

Within a few days the fighting in the region subsided. The Russian command took up its position in the town, and Russian soldiers were billeted in the town and in the school building. Among the soldiers were some who raped and murdered anyone that they could get hold of. The girls remained in the principal's apartment for another two days, until they got passes from the Russian army.

On the way home

Now began the exhausting two-month long journey home. Braving the Polish winter, the girls walked barefoot, wearing thin blouses, without vests, without coats. They crossed Poland without a map. They went by tortuous ways. They were frightened of the Russians who seized people indiscriminately and sent them to Siberia; they were frightened of the Poles who were anti-Semitic and violent. Despite the danger it involved, they had no choice but to ask the farmers for food. Once they got potatoes cooked in their peels (a delicacy at that time), and another time a farmer's wife took them into her house and fed them, but her son who returned home in the evening almost killed them out of hatred.

When they came to the city Ostrow Mazowieckie fortune favored them and the whole group got lodgings in an attic. They stayed there for 18 days. Lucu went to stroll in the city with a girl who spoke Polish, and again luck was on their side: in their search for food they came to a family that received them with open arms. This was a Catholic anti-Nazi family, whose daughter had been sent to Auschwitz and had not returned. The family treated them to a huge meal, set out on a white cloth with real plates and cutlery, and, dressed in rags and crawling with lice, they ate their fill.

The Catholic family put the women in touch with a Jew who had already returned to his town and had become an agent for the K.G.B. This Jew had connections and he put them on a freight train and even had them accompanied by a young girl to help them. (It later turned out that the girl was a prostitute and didn't exactly carry out the job she was supposed to). Both the Catholic family and the Jew gave the girls some money and food.

The journey in a freight train, in open coaches with no roof above their heads, lasted several days. Every now and then the train stopped for several hours because of air raids. They traveled sitting on logs of wood, frozen with the snow and biting wind. At last the train reached its destination, and the women again continued their way home on foot.

They reached Lublin and stayed there for a week. In Lublin there was already an organization that gave assistance to the survivors. They were put up in a school; they got a hot meal and some money. From Lublin they continued by train to Czechoslovakia, where they were helped by survivors of the labor camps who had already returned home. Those women who were natives of Czechoslovakia left the group and travelled home.

The group, which now numbered 10-12 women, continued on their way and crossed the border to Hungary, near the town Homonna (now Humenne in Slovakia). In Homonna they managed to catch a passenger train that took them to Romania. (The railway system hadn't begun to operate on a regular basis because the war hadn't ended yet; the few trains that did run, didn't follow a fixed timetable.)

They came to Satu Mare, the first place they had known from before the war. Seven women native to Cehul Silvaniei went through the ordeals of this long journey together and survived. In Satu Mare, which had in the meantime returned to Romanian rule (together with northern Transylvania), two women in the group found out that their husbands were alive (after 4 years of forced labor), and were in their homes. It is impossible to describe the joy that this news brought to the entire group.

They left Satu Mare as well by passenger train. This time, too, without paying for a ticket, which was the accepted thing for everybody, including the ticket seller. They got off at Supuru de Jos, the stop closest to Cehul Silvaniei. This was on March 15th 1945. They were the first to return from the concentration camps. In Supuru de Jos the girls met acquaintances who had returned shortly earlier from forced labor. The women were received with joy but also with amazement, because they thought that no one had come out of the camps alive. Altogether 30 of the 550 deportees from Cehul Silvaniei returned. The girls spent the night with these acquaintances who took them to Cehul Silvaniei the next day.

At home

The Blau girls returned home dressed in rags, a borrowed blanket over their heads to protect them from the cold, and infested with lice. They found their house looted. In the town they were welcomed by a few young men who had come back from forced labor. Lucu was completely worn out and fell seriously ill with pneumonia. She was hospitalized in Cluj for about a month. After that she suffered from fever and exhaustion for two years.

At the end of the war, in May 1945, Imre Hoffman, a native of Cehul Silvaniei, was liberated from forced labor and returned to the town. After a short time Imre and Lucu were married.

General rehabilitation and nationalization of property

All set to work. Lucu got back empty buildings and petrol tanks without any contents, and she began to re-establish the family business which was disintegrating. Imre, who had inherited a flour mill, a factory producing oil, estates and a tractor, also began to develop his business afresh.

After two years, the Communist government nationalized all the big private concerns. In Cehul Silvaniei only Imre's and Lucu's works were requisitioned. All their hard work came to nothing. At first they were employed as directors of their former factories. Later, when Imre's deputy had got to know the ropes, Imre was dismissed. Lucu agreed to give up her job, and Imre took her place. It wasn't long before they began to harass them on the grounds that they were "representatives of capitalism" of the old days. The harassment increased continuously to such an extent that they were forced to leave Cehul Silvaniei and move to a town where no one knew them.

Emigration to Israel

Although they had been deprived of their property and their livelihood, those who had ousted them did not let them emigrate to Israel. Immediately after the war they had the possibility of escaping on foot by tortuous routes and to immigrate to Israel illegally, but Lucu was too weak to embark on such an adventure. Later announcements were posted in the streets of the town that anyone wanting to emigrate to Israel could register and would receive an exit permit. Lucu and Imre were among those who applied, but only a very few got emigration permits. All the "refuseniks" were proclaimed "traitors": they were deposed from responsible positions, and were no longer appointed to fulfill important functions. These tactics encouraged anti-Semites, leading them to think that once again the time had come for them to give unrestrained expression to their feelings.

In 1949, *Aliya* [emigration to Israel] was stopped by the authorities altogether, and was only renewed in the early sixties. Most of the Jews who returned from the inferno did not remain in Cehul Silvaniei but emigrated to Israel or further afield. In 1960 Irene (Lucu's sister) and her family emigrated to Australia. In 1962, after waiting for an exit permit for 17 years, Lucu, Imre and their son Giora made Aliya to Israel. Those who at the beginning of the communist era in Romania thought that slogans would turn into reality, had in the meantime come to understand only too well that both the Communist regime and the common people were not interested in the Jews.

About ten years ago (around 1980), the Communists destroyed the synagogue in Cehul Silvaniei, which in its prime had been the pride of the community, and built a hospital in its place. Today (1990, forty-five years after the end of the war, there is only one old Jew, Sandor Königstein, who is married to a non-Jewish woman. (Sandor's father was the accountant in the bank in which Grandfather Jozsef had worked.) Old Sandor looks after the Jewish cemetery. The graveyard is thus the only testimony to the splendid community that once existed and is no more.

Chapter 5

Aunt Nendi

Girlhood

Nendi, Granny's sister, was the youngest daughter of my grandfather – Grandfather Yitzhak Blau. Over the years all her sisters emigrated to Belgium, and she alone remained in Cehul Silvaniei.

The financial situation in Grandfather Yitzhak's house deteriorated, from the time that he lost his property at the end of World War I. Nendi's girlhood years were spent in poverty during the great financial crisis of the thirties. Grandfather Yitzhak had to sell his beautiful large house which he had built in his early days. To his chagrin he was even forced to ask his wife and daughter to help him in running the inn although the place was full of uncouth non-Jews. At night, at closing time, Nendi had to drive out the drunkards who refused to leave the inn.

Marriage

As Nendi reached marriageable age the custom of providing a dowry was still prevalent in the region, which of course limited the options open to her. Her father did the best he could afford and prepared a modest dowry. He looked for an orthodox observant son-in-law. In 1938 Nendi married Joseph Hirsch, a chiseler by trade, and moved to Tirgu Mures, 140 km south of Cehul Silvaniei.

Right from the beginning of their marriage, employment problems arose. Joseph Hirsch, not finding work in his field, opened a workshop for manufacturing buttons, but very soon went bankrupt. Nendi returned to her parents' home for many months and kept herself by doing domestic work. In 1940 the young couple moved to Budapest in search of a living. (They settled in the Jewish quarter in Budapest Wesselenyi utca 65.)

In 1942 Joseph was rounded up for forced labor, and came home only for short leaves. At first he was stationed in Hungary and after a while in Austria, working mainly as storemaster carrying loads. In November 1943 their only son Jekuthiel (Oscar), nicknamed Kutti for short, was born. During this period Nendi felt very lonely in Budapest, which seemed to her a large, strange city.

The last visit to Cehul Silvaniei

In the winter of 1944 Nendi traveled to Cehul Silvaniei and spent Purim and the Passover with her parents. At this time (March 19th 1944) the Germans invaded Hungary and the anti-Jewish decrees became more and more virulent. And as though the decrees promulgated by the authorities were not enough, the district commissioner for Salaj, Bela Sami, imposed decrees of his own. One of these decrees, passed on April 19th 1944, said that any Jew whose permanent place of residence was not Salaj, had to leave the district. Nendi was compelled to leave her parents and return to Budapest. None of them imagined that this would be the last time they bade each other farewell; that within a few days they would enclose her parents in the ghetto, and that within a single month they would end up in the incinerators of Auschwitz.

The ways of G-d are wonderful

No doubt the separation decree seemed cruel to Nendi and her parents. It obliged them to separate just at the time when the Nazi oppressors overran Hungary, a time when the Jews, frightened and shocked, would have preferred to keep together. However, it never entered their minds, and it certainly never occurred to the depraved creator of this decree, that this very decree would save Nendi's and Kutti's lives.

It is not for nothing that every morning Jews recite the blessing "... Who has provided all my **needs**", and not "... Who has performed my **will**."

Protective Passes and protected houses in Budapest

The Nazis planned to deport the Jews of Budapest to Auschwitz as soon as they had completed the deportation from the provinces. Preparations for the deportation began in the second half of June 1944, with the rounding up of the Budapest Jews in about 2,000 houses that had been marked with the yellow Star of David. This was a ghetto spread over the whole town, and was no better than a ghetto concentrated in one place. Like many buildings most of whose inhabitants were Jewish, the building in which Joseph and Nendi lived, was turned into one of the buildings of the ghetto which was spread over the town (the "dispersed ghetto"). At the entrance to the building they put up a prominent sign, the yellow star of David against a black background. Within a few days the apartments in the building filled up with Jewish families who had been driven out of their homes. Each family was assigned just one room. At the same time their movements outside the building were limited to three hours a day.

The deportation of the Jews of Budapest to Auschwitz was supposed to begin on July 10th. But the Jews of Budapest fared better than the other Hungarian Jews, and their deportation was not carried out as planned. On July 7th Admiral Horthy, the governor of Hungary, ordered the deportation of the Hungarian Jews to be stopped, and thus for the moment he saved their lives. (Horthy yielded to international and internal pressure to stop the deportations. He was also influenced by the landing of the Allied forces on the beaches of Normandy on June 6th 1944.)

During the "interlude" in the deportations the Jews in Budapest did their best to survive. One of the means of doing so was to try and obtain a "Schutz-Pass" [protective pass] from a neutral country. Those Jews fortunate enough to get such a pass enjoyed the protection of the country that issued the document, and representatives of that country protected or at least tried to protect them from those who tried to do away with them.

A central figure who was very active in issuing Schutz-Pässe and whose name is associated with the rescue of many thousand of Budapest Jews, was Raoul Wallenberg, the attaché of the Swedish Embassy in Budapest. Wallenberg came to Budapest in July 1944, under the sponsorship of Jewish organizations in the free countries in order to try and save the remnants of Jewry. When Wallenberg came to Budapest, the Swedish Embassy, following the example of the Swiss delegation, began issuing Schutz-Pässe to the Jews. The Vatican, and to a lesser extent, Spain and Portugal followed suit. Concurrently, the Jews forged tens of thousands of Schutz-Pässe in a secret printing press. In the end, almost 100,000 of the Jews in Budapest held either genuine or forged Schutz-Pässe.

Wallenberg also initiated the establishment of "Swedish houses": he housed the holders of Schutz-Pässe in houses that he rented or bought in the city's fifth quarter, so as to facilitate the protection of these Jews. These Swedish houses came to be known as "protected houses". At the beginning of November the Nazis set up the "international ghetto": they compelled all the holders of Schutz-Pässe to move into the "protected houses" in the fifth quarter. At the front of each of the "protected houses" they put up the emblem of one of the neutral countries, according to the Schutz-Pass held by its inmates.

The "protected houses" were among the houses bearing the sign of the yellow star of David (the dispersed ghetto). Those inmates of the dispersed ghetto who had no Schutz-Pass (about 4,000) had to leave in favor of Schutz-Pass holders (about 16,000). Some of the holders of forged Schutz-Pässe also hid in the "protected houses" which held altogether more than 30,000 persons and there was great overcrowding. The process of gathering together the "protected" Jews was completed by November 14th 1944. At the beginning of December the "non-protected" Jews were rounded up in a closed ghetto – the "central ghetto".

The house in which Nendi lived was within the "central ghetto". While the ghetto was being set up Nendi approached the Swedish Embassy and asked for a Schutz-Pass. (The Jews were forbidden to leave the house, so, as she left, Nendi concealed the yellow star of David – an act for which was sufficient to be shot on the spot if she was caught; on the way a well-disposed non-Jewish woman drew her attention to the fact that the yellow star wasn't properly hidden). At this time Wallenberg distributed Schutz-Pässe to all who asked for one, and not only to those who had some connection with Sweden. Nendi succeeded in obtaining a Schutz-Pass and together with her baby Jekuthiel she moved into one of the houses protected by the Swedes.

Nazi rule in Budapest

In the middle of October 1944, the leader of the Hungarian Nazis, Ferenc Szalasi and his party, the "Arrow Cross" came to power. Following the change of power it became possible for Eichmann and his henchmen to return to Budapest and resume the deportation of the Jews. (Eichmann had been in Budapest from May 1944 and organized the deportation with the full co-operation of the Hungarians. Because of the change in Hungarian policy and Admiral Horthy's opposition to the deportation of the Jews, as explained above, Eichmann was forced to return to Germany in August 1944.) However, this time for various historical reasons, the Nazis were not able to wipe out the Jews of Budapest with the same ease that they had exterminated the Jews in the provinces. At any rate, by the autumn of 1944 the Germans no longer had at their disposal the means of transportation necessary for mass deportation.

Eichmann thought up the idea of deporting the Jews to Austria (on foot), so that they should dig trenches and fortifications to protect Vienna. On 8.11.1944 there began the death march of the Jews of Budapest, men, women, the elderly and children towards Vienna, a distance of 200 km. Within a month the Hungarians managed to send off 37,000 Jews. About ten thousand of them died on the way from exhaustion and starvation, or were shot dead because they found the walking difficult.

Those Jews of Budapest who were not sent on the death march were, as has been mentioned, put into the ghetto. 50,000 Budapest Jews were driven into the "central ghetto", by December 2nd 1944, under great overcrowding, and by January 1945 their number reached 70,000. (The rest of Budapest Jewry succeeded in hiding among non-Jews, or they held Schutz-Pässe issued by foreign countries and so had previously been accommodated in the "international ghetto".) The "central ghetto" which was also called the "big ghetto" was situated in the Jewish quarter (the seventh quarter), and was encompassed by a high wooden fence. At the four gates of the ghetto policemen were stationed and they did not let anyone leave. Together with the policemen bands of hooligans of the "Arrow Cross" party stood at the entrances, and these confiscated whatever they fancied of the meager supplies that reached the ghetto.

The Jews suffered from hunger in the ghetto; despite the cold and the snow that covered the city, the buildings were not heated. The ghetto served as a target for raids by "Arrow Cross" gangs and armed Germans and Hungarians in uniform who spread terror as they butchered the Jews. From the time that the Russian army surrounded Budapest, at the end of December 1944, the ghetto also came under the onslaught of Russian shelling.

Very soon the security that the protected houses offered diminished, since the "Arrow Cross" gangs did not honor agreements. The riffraff that formed these bands knew no limits and they plundered, tortured and killed as they pleased, - egged on, as they were by, Szalasi and his government. The "Arrow Cross" ruffians would go into the protected houses and take out the inmates by force. "Protected" Jews, like "unprotected" Jews, who were seized by "Arrow Cross" gangs, were murdered and their bodies were thrown into the River Danube.

At the end of December the Russians surrounded Budapest and bombed the city unceasingly. Anyone leaving his house to look for food ran the risk of being hit. Nendi and her son had to go hungry. Having no means of heating they also suffered from the bitter cold as this was a particularly hard winter. Budapest was taken by house to house fighting. On January 18th 1945 the Russians liberated the city. Together with Nendi and Kutti about 120,000 of the Budapest Jews survived.

Back to Transylvania

It was there in Budapest after the liberation that Yossi Weisz, Nendi's and Granny's cousin (See Chapter 15 on his family.), found them starving and destitute. Yossi Weisz owned a thriving timber business that he had inherited from his parents, and he came to Budapest in connection with his business and to trace his relatives. He invited Nendi and Kutti to his large house in Simleul Silvaniei (the town where only a year earlier the district ghetto had been, the ghetto from which our relations had been sent to Auschwitz). Together with his wife Barbara (Biri) Lindenfeld, he cared for all their needs. When Joseph Hirsch, Nendi's husband, was liberated from forced labor in Galicia, he joined his wife and son in the home of family Weisz.

For about a year family Hirsch stayed with their cousin, until the Communist government requisitioned the house and the business. Nendi and her family went on living in Simleul Silvaniei, but they had no means of support. Kutti learned in a "Heder" [a young boys'school for religious Jewish studies] in Yiddish. (At home he spoke Hungarian, and outside the home Romanian.) During this period Nendi went to Cehul Silvaniei and found that all the Jews' books were collected together in the synagogue. In spite of the difficult conditions (no fixed place of residence, having to move

from place to place and emigrating to Israel), Nendi took with her some of her father's books. (Later, in Israel, she shared them with her sisters.)

In Transylvania, Nendi left her husband. In 1950 Nendi and Kutti emigrated to Israel. Joseph Hirsch also came to Israel.

In Israel

Nendi and Kutti had a hard life in Israel, too. She was on her own, without any financial resources, having to take care of a small boy, with no spiritual support and not knowing the language. From the first day she came to Israel luck was against her: Nendi had hoped to rest a little with her cousins (Surika Goldschmidt and Ahron Nachlon) in Kibbutz Sdeh Eliyahu after her strenuous journey. However, soon after her arrival, a polio epidemic broke out in Israel. In order to prevent members of the kibbutz from catching the dreaded disease, the kibbutz enforced a self-imposed quarantine, and Nendi was asked to leave.

Nendi went to live in Jerusalem. Her first place of residence was "Beit Hahalutzot" in the Baq'a neighborhood – a hostel which took in single girls. To be accepted into Beit Hahalutzot, Nendi, to her sorrow, had to part with Kutti; she put him into a Youth Aliya home. For a short while Nendi found work in this home. It was not until 1957, when her financial situation became more settled, and she had moved to her own apartment in Kiryat Yovel, that she took Kutti back.

For years Nendi worked in the kitchen of the Hadassa hospital, which at the time was in Rehov Strauss. After the hospital moved to Ein Kerem, Nendi was given lighter work in the department for the supply of sterile medical equipment.

Most of her time in Israel, Nendi was on her own. In 1968 she married again, this time Ephraim Walter. But this marriage, too, foundered and lasted only for a short while. Once again Nendi was alone. Her family opened their doors to her and she spent many of the festivals with them, but in fact she remained solitary. Once she saw Kutti married and settled, and having retired, Nendi no longer had the spiritual strength to remain alone and look after herself. She went to live in an old age home, where she stayed for 13 years – till the day she died. Nandi Genendel the daughter of Yitzhak Eizik née Blau of blessed memory, died aged 76 on the tenth of Shevat 5750 (February 5th 1990).

Her funeral was attended by those relatives of the family who survived, among them, Yossi Weisz – her cousin who helped her at the end of the war. Joseph Hirsch also came to take leave of her.

Nendi's grave, on Mt. Menuhot in Jerusalem, is opposite the grave of her sister Alice (Granny). After all those years when a great distance lay between the two, after all the vicissitudes of life and the suffering that kept them apart, only a few meters separate the two sisters in death.

With the death of Nendi, and in the absence of any male descendants, there is no one left in the family to carry the name Blau.

The Descendants of Nendi

Kutti married Sima and they have 4 children, Dikla Leah, Yasmin Shoshana, Noga Esther and Yitzhak. Their eldest daughter, Dikla Leah, and their son, Yitzhak, are called after Nendi's parents, Yitzhak and Leah Blau, thus symbolizing the continuity of the chain of generations.

Part Two

Family Nussbächer

Chapter 6

Family Nussbächer

How surprised the villager who planted the walnut trees near the brook would have been, had he known what this would lead to. It was due to this non-Jew that the head of the family adopted the name Nussbächer. Family tradition has it that the head of the Nussbächer family earned his living by leasing the large estate of a Hungarian nobleman. The way to the estate passed along a brook along whose bank there was an avenue of walnut trees. When the Jews of Transylvania had to choose surnames (at the time of Emperor Joseph II of Austria, 1780 - 1790), the head of the family chose "Nussbächer", which meant "the owner of the brook by the walnut trees". That is how the name Nussbächer came to circulate in our family (Nussbächer in German, Nuszbacher in Hungarian). Aharon (of Sdeh Eliyahu) translated the name into Hebrew: "Nachalon". Yoel, a descendant of another branch of the family, hebraised the name to "Palgi".

Granny's grandmother, Gitel Nussbächer, had a tradition according to which the Nussbächer family originated from two brothers who emigrated from France to Transylvania around the year 1790. One took on the name Hirsch and the other Nussbächer. The family tradition says that the people of Transylvania called the two families by the name of "Hendikes" after the name of their place of origin in France. Were they thinking of the village Chanduc near Verdun in the Lorraine area, or maybe some other place? I shall never know. We shall also never know whether the Hendikes left France in the wake of the riots in Alsace in the summer of 1789.

The French Revolution, which began on July 14th 1789 in Paris, spread all over France within a few days, with the peasants rising against the nobility and clergy. (These riots were known as "the Great Terror" "La Grande Peur".) In several places in Alsace and Lorraine Jews were also attacked, and more than a thousand Jews fled to Basle and Mulhouse. Most of the refugees returned to their homes after a few weeks, but the minority, those whose houses had been destroyed, or who were still being threatened by the local people, were forced to wander to new places.

Be that as it may, the Hendikes came to Transylvania, were called Nussbächer, and settled in Tradam, near the city of Nasaud in Nasaud (Beszterce-Naszod) County.

Tradam is a small village which was one of the first places to have a concentration of Jews in Transylvania. Until World War I almost all its inhabitants were Jewish, - about 300 souls, a unique situation in all Transylvania. In the past the village was called Jidovita, from the old Romanian word "Jidov", meaning Jew. As time passed, the village Tradam was united with the nearby village Lusca, and today they form the village Rebreanu. The Jewish cemetery, that served both villages, is in Lusca.

The inhabitants of Tradam formed the first nucleus of the Jewish community that was founded in the nearby city of Nasaud, as soon as Jews were allowed to live in the town. (In Nasaud, too, the order forbidding Jews to live in towns in Transylvania, was in force until 1848.) From the beginning the Jewish establishment in Nasaud developed very quickly, and in 1866 there were already more than 800 Jews in the town. The Jews were mainly merchants who traded, or acted as middlemen, in the agricultural produce of the region.

In Nasaud and its environs Romanians, who made up the poor section of the population, Hungarians, who held power, and Germans lived side by side. (In one of the historical upheavals, the king of Hungary moved whole groups of Germans to this region, in order to develop it and help it progress. The Germans did indeed establish very beautiful, clean and tidy villages, and did not let a single Jew set foot within its boundaries!). Between the Romanian and the Hungarian sections of the population there was always great tension, which never let up from one generation to the next, as one can deduce from the events in Timisoara in 1990.

The Nussbächers were known for certain characteristic traits: their beautiful women, their eccentric and unconventional views, as well as their punctilious observance of Jewish laws. Proof of their close adherence to Jewish law can be seen in the words of Granny's uncle (Moshe Nussbächer), who was very proud of telling of the high regard in which his family was held by Rabbi Yechezkel Paneth, the author of "Mareh Yechezkel". (This eminent Rabbi was active during the first half of the 19th century; in 1823 he was appointed Chief Rabbi of Transylvania and was successful in raising the spiritual level of Transylvanian Jewry).

The fathers of the Family

1. Shlomo Yitzchak Gershon Nussbächer and his five sons

Shlomo Yitzchak Gershon Nussbächer, Granny's great-grandfather, and his wife, Henna Bluma, were born around 1820 and lived during the 19th century. It is quite possible that they themselves already left the village for the city Nasaud. (True, Shlomo Nussbächer is buried in the village Lusca, but this does not rule out the possibility that he lived in Nasaud; when the Jews first settled in the town there was no Jewish cemetery in Nasaud, and at the time, the dead were buried in the cemetery in the village of Lusca). At any event, some of Shlomo's sons lived in Nasaud, and some moved to other regions in northern Transylvania.

We know of five sons of Shlomo, and they are the heads of the various branches of the Nussbächer family. And these are the sons: Aharon, Yechezkel, Marcus, Abraham and Ya'akov.

Aharon Nussbächer, Granny's grandfather, was born about 1847. The greater part of this book deals with his descendants, and we shall go into greater detail later on.

Yechezkel Nussbächer was born in 1850. In order to avoid military service he changed his name to Yechezkel Salomon (similar to Shlomo, his father's first name). While he was in the process of changing his name, luck played into his hands, for the community's register of births got burned. (It will be remembered that at this period, the religious authority kept the population records). In the absence of the original records, Yechezkel reported to the military authorities where he professed his new identity and gave his age as older than it actually was, so that the duty of military service no longer applied to him.

Yechezkel lived in the town Somcuta Mare. He earned his living in a hat factory that he owned and in dealing in *etrogim* [citron fruit]. He would travel far afield to buy the citron fruit, his journeys taking him as far as Trieste in Northern Italy. His son-in-law, Moshe Farkas, who expanded the business, traveled as far as the island of Corfu in Greece, where the citron grows.

(For the first time, my family's history crosses or almost crosses with the history of the family of my husband, Binyamin. Joseph Besso, Binyamin's great-grandfather, lived in Corfu and dealt in citron fruit. Family Besso moved to Trieste in 1903 and Reb Joseph gave up dealing in citron fruit. If Moshe Farkas had come to Corfu just a little earlier (10–20 years), he might quite possibly have traded with Reb Joseph Besso).

Yechezkel Salomon did a lot of good in his lifetime. Among other things, he took under his wing a poor family from Israel, distant relatives of his, a family which comprised three generations. He invited the family to Somcuta Mare and provided them with a place of residence and a source of livelihood. One of the children of the family was Yehoshua Bar Yosef, who was later to become a writer in Israel, and who, in his book, "Between Safed and Jerusalem", described some of the members of the Salomon family, including Yechezkel and his son Mendel (Abraham Menahem), who was the author's landlord.

This is how Bar Yosef described Yechezkel Salomon:

I still remember the patriarchal figure of the squat, rotund Reb Yechezkel, with his long white beard. In his house there was always the smell of sauerkraut. For *Seuda Shlishit* [the third and last meal of the Sabbath] a score of neighbors would come in, they would sing the Sabbath songs to the same old melody, then recite the evening prayer, and hear him make the *Havdala* blessing [ending the Sabbath]. Old Reb Yechezkel's eyes shone like strange sparks framed by his beard and white hair. As soon as the *Havdala* blessing was over, his wife [his second wife

by whom he had no children] would bring him his long pipe with a glowing ember for the tobacco, and place a box of cigarettes on the table offering the guests their first cigarette after the Sabbath.

One of Yechezkel's daughters, Leah, married her cousin – Leibi Nussbächer – one of his brother Aharon's sons, of whom we shall have more to tell later on. (Among the grandchildren there were also ties of marriage between the two families).

Marcus Nussbächer went to live in the village of Sintereag, about 20 km south of Nasaud. His son, David, raised his family – 8 sons and daughters – in the city of Bistrita. Some of David's descendants emigrated to Israel after the Holocaust, but only two, Tilli and Asher, settled in Israel (Tilli died in Tel Aviv in 1991, childless). Asher died in 1978 and his daughter remained the only member of this branch of the Nussbacher family in Israel).

Nathan, the son of Abraham Nussbächer, lived in the village of Sintereag in 1879. We do not know what connection there was between Nathan Nussbächer and our family, but since the name Nussbächer is so rare, it is reasonable to assume that Nathan is also connected to the Nussbächer family and all its ramifications. Nathan's son was called Chaim Zvi (Herman) Nussbächer, and he and his sons were also born in Sintereag. Nathan's grandsons, Nathan (born in 1899), and Menachem (born in 1901), and his great-grandson, Zvi, the son of Nathan, perished in the Holocaust. Nathan and 13-year-old Zvi died in Dachau; Menachem starved to death in the Ukraine. Beile Nussbächer, Chaim Zvi's wife, the mother of Nathan and Menachem, came to Israel and died in an old age home at the end of the fifties.

Abraham Nussbächer lived in the village of Bozinta near the city Baia Mare. Together with his wife, Gitel, Abraham raised 14 children. His children were spread all over Hungary, and we have only very little information about them. One of his grandsons, Bumi (Abraham), married the granddaughter of his brother Aharon – Buki Nussbächer, the sister of Surika Goldschmidt and Aharon Nahalon.

Ya'akov Nussbächer lived in the village Tradam (in 1879 he still lived in the village). Later he moved to Nasaud, where he died around 1912. His children settled all over Transylvania. After Ya'akov's death, his wife, Montzi, went to live with their daughter, Yetti Hirsch, in the city of Timisoara in southern Transylvania. The Jews of southern Transylvania, it will be remembered, suffered less from Nazi oppression than did those of northern Transylvania, but all the same, the family did suffer from anti-Semitism and Fascism. Shimon, Yetti's eldest son, was killed together with his wife in 1938 when the Fascists threw a bomb into the auditorium of the Jewish theater during a performance in Yiddish (in this incident another two Jews were killed, and 60 were injured). One of Yetti's grandsons is Micha Harisch, who in 1992 took up the post of Minister of Trade and Industry as a member of the Labor party in the Israeli Government.

Another famous descendant of Ya'akov Nussbächer is the paratrooper, Yoel Palgi, who was born in Cluj, the capital of Transylvania. Yoel made *Aliya* in 1939 and was a member of Kibbutz Ma'agan. In the midst of the Holocaust he volunteered as a paratrooper in occupied Europe in a desperate attempt to reach the Jews and help them as they fought for their lives. In 1944 he parachuted into Yugoslavia, together with Peretz Goldstein, and from there they penetrated into Hungary. As soon as they crossed the border the paratroopers got caught in the network of the Hungarian secret police and were thrown into prison. In the prison they met Hannah Szenes, and like her they endured cruel torture. Yoel escaped from the death train and organized the passage of Holocaust survivors to Israel. Yoel wrote a book entitled "*Ruach gedola ba'a*" (And behold, a great wind came) telling about his mission and all that happened to him in Hungary. Yoel was the first commander of the paratroopers' school, and he was elected to the first Knesset (the Israeli parliament).

2. Shlomo Nussbächer (the cousin) and his twelve descendants

Shlomo Nussbächer, a cousin of the five Nussbächer brothers whose history we have just presented, lived in Nasaud and was the father of a large family of 12 children. Shlomo earned his living by producing sweetened raspberry juice; Aharon Nachalon found refuge in his house in 1918, when he fled from rioters, as we shall relate in due course.

Shlomo Nussbächer's eldest grandson, Moshe Mozes, lived in Nasaud, and went to learn in the *Heder* everyday in the village of Tradam. In the year 1922 the River Somesul Mare overflowed its banks and 70 of the boys together with their tutor drowned. Only the 11-year-old Moshe escaped the floods. Maria, queen of Romania, came to visit the scene of the disaster and granted compensation to Moshe and his family. With the money the family bought a large house in the city of Tirgu-Mures. Later Moshe continued his studies which were paid for by the queen.

Aharon Nussbächer – Granny's grandfather

Aharon Nussbächer lived in Nasaud. The members of the Nussbächer family, like most of the Jews in Nasaud, had mastery of all the languages spoken in the region, Hungarian, Romanian and German (also Yiddish), which gave them an advantage in their business dealings. Aharon had a government license for selling tobacco products, strong drink and salt. By virtue of the royal monopoly (*Regie*) which he enjoyed, he was the only one in the whole town and round about who was permitted to sell these products. He also sat on the board of directors of the local bank. For years after Aharon's death the picture of the members of the board of directors of the bank, including Aharon, used to hang in the house.

Now here is an episode in connection with another picture of Aharon Nussbächer: Icu Weisz, a grandson of Aharon Nussbächer (see below Chapter 15 - "Aunt Netti and Family Weisz"), emigrated to South Africa in 1931. Once in Johannesburg, an elderly Jew was sitting opposite him in a tram without taking his eyes off him. As Icu got off the tram, the Jew got off after him and asked him if he (Icu) was a grandson of Reb Aharon Nussbächer of Nasaud. The Jew told him that he was from the town Beclean near Nasaud, and he remembered that when he was a child there was a picture of the grandfather – Aharon Nussbächer – hanging in his house, and because of the resemblance between them he recognized Icu. This is without a doubt most convincing evidence of the grandfather's prestigious standing.

Aharon Nussbächer was the head of the community in Nasaud, and exerted considerable influence. The Rabbi of Nasaud lived in the neighboring village Tradam from the time that most of the members of the community lived there. Grandfather preferred that the Rabbi should continue to direct the spiritual matters of the community from a distance, so that he (Grandfather) could run the community affairs according to his outlook, without any confrontation between them. This is why the Rabbi moved from Tradam to Nasaud only after Aharon Nussbächer's death.

Despite the distance between them, a dispute did once arise between the Rabbi and Aharon, a dispute which got as far as the National Office of the Organization of Orthodox Jews of Hungary (the highest organizational as well as the highest legal institution of Hungary). This is what happened: Grandfather once met the *Shochet* [ritual slaughterer], Reb Mendel, as the latter was returning from the slaughterhouse in the early hours of the morning, smelling heavily of drink. When Grandfather asked him, the *Shochet* explained that it was very cold, and that he could not slaughter without this way of warming up. Grandfather did not accept this explanation, and insisted that a man under the influence of drink was not capable of slaughtering according to the ritual precepts, and he ordered him: "Mendel give me the slaughterer's knife". Without a knife Mendel was no longer a *Shochet*. The *Shochet* went to the Rabbi, who decided in his favor. In spite of the Rabbi's decision Grandfather would not agree that Reb Mendel should return to his job. Grandfather only gave in when the National Office of the Organization of Orthodox Jews sided with the Rabbi.

For himself, too, Aharon was very strict in the matter of kosher food. He had to travel every so often to the capital Budapest on business, which meant being away from home for several days. On all his journeys he would take food with him, so as not to make use of the meat slaughtered in Budapest. "If my Mendel slipped up, how can I rely on the 30 *Shochetim* of Reb Koppel Reich (the Chief Rabbi of Budapest) ?", he explained.

Aharon Nussbächer died suddenly in 1905, aged only 58. He returned from morning prayers, told Grandmother Gitel that he was not feeling well, and took to his bed. When Grandmother went in to him, Aharon had already passed on into a better world.

After Aharon Nussbächer's death

After Aharon's death a great dispute arose between his children, as to who would run the business. His daughter, Esther Bracha, (my grandmother, Granny's mother) was already engaged to my

grandfather – Yitzchak Eizik Blau, and she was working in the business. Because of the great responsibility that the new situation brought with it, she wanted to terminate the engagement and take her father’s place. In the end it was decided that the brother, Kassiel, (the father of Aharon Nachalon) should stop learning in the Yeshiva in Chust, under Rabbi Moshe Gruenwald, (the author of the book “*Arugot Habosem*”), and should return home and run the business although he was still very young. Esther Bracha demanded that she be given a smaller dowry, so as not to withdraw such a large sum of money from the business just at this time. Later, Moshe, the youngest brother, was forced to forego his studies at the Yeshiva altogether and go into the family business.

Moshe used to tell an interesting story about himself: after his father’s death a great responsibility fell on him, not at all commensurate with his tender years. One winter he was traveling to buy salt to Dej where there was a salt mine. On the way home he was driving a long train of sledges laden with salt, and since it was very cold he wrapped himself up in coats and blankets. During the journey Moshe fell off the sledge without anybody noticing. When the train of sledges reached home, they discovered that their leader was missing; when they went back to look for him they found him sleeping by the wayside.

After all her children had married, Grandmother Gitel stayed a lot in her son Moshe’s house in the town Seini. She preferred living with him rather than with any of her other children. Gitel Malka the daughter of Ze’ev died in Nasaud on the first of Av 5639 (17.7.1939), aged over 90 years.

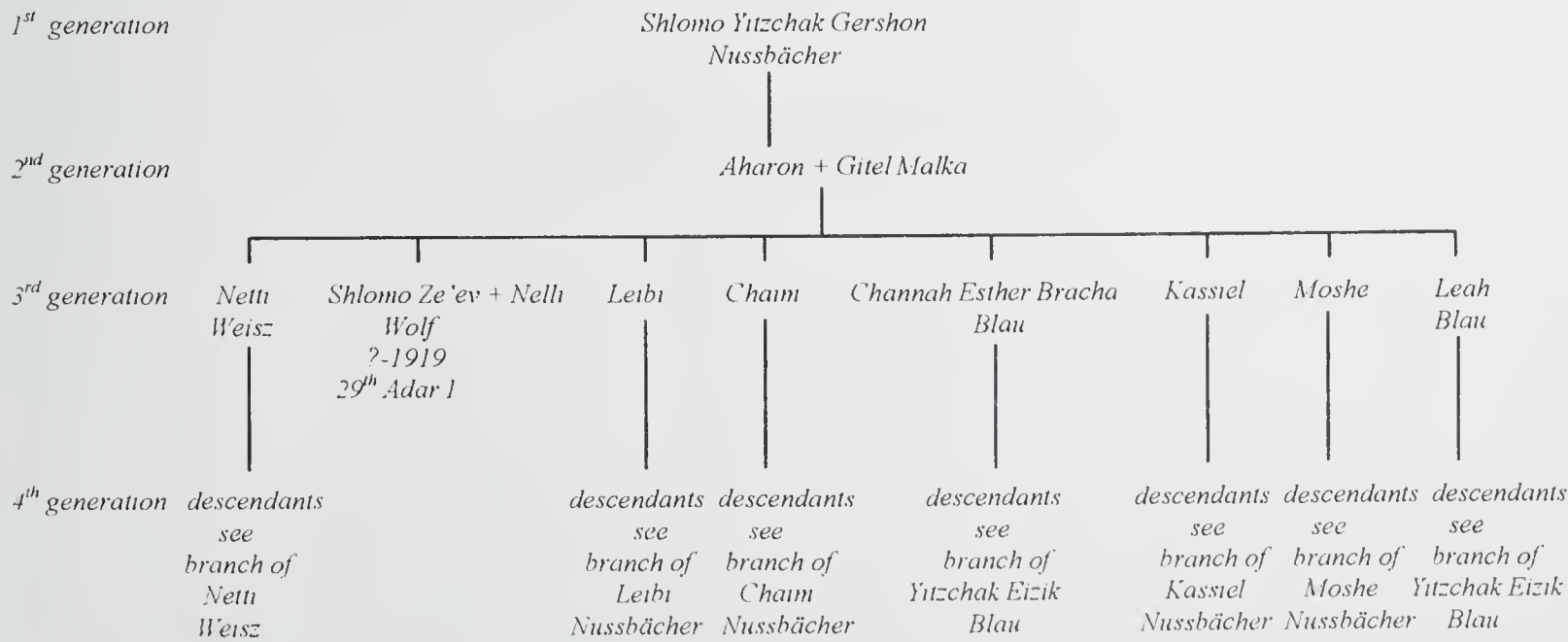
The descendants of Aharon and Gitel Nussbächer

Grandfather Aharon and Grandmother Gitel had eight descendants (actually more children were born to them, but they died in infancy). Not one of Aharon and Gitel’s children reached old age; they either died prematurely or perished at the hands of the Nazi oppressors.

These are the names of the children of Grandfather Aharon and Grandmother Gitel, in order of birth:

- Chaya Genendel (Netti);
- Shlomo Ze’ev (Volvi) – died in 1919, childless, while undergoing a simple operation;
- Yitzchak Yehuda (Leibi) – Avraham Nussbächer’s father;
- Chaim (Herman);
- Channah Esther Bracha (Bertha) – my grandmother, about whom I have written at the beginning of this book;
- Jekuthiel Zvi (Kassiel Carol) – the father of Aharon Nachalon and Surika Goldschmidt;
- Moshe (Moritz Mor) – Kicsi Nussbächer’s father;
- Leah (Lenka Lenke) – my step-grandmother, whom I have also spoken about already.

We shall still hear about Leibi, Chaim, Kassiel and Moshe further on.



Note: this is only a partial family tree; for detailed family trees see the end of the book.

Chapter 7

Uncle Chaim

Chaim Nussbächer, Granny's uncle, (her mother's brother), lived in Nasaud and later in Cluj. He specialized in the cattle trade: he would travel to cattle fairs, buy fatted oxen, load them onto a train and travel abroad, to Czechoslovakia or Vienna, where he would sell them.

Chaim Nussbächer traveled a great deal to do business. On one of his journeys, probably in 1935, the taxi in which he was traveling, collided with a train, and Chaim was seriously injured. (There were some other passengers in the taxi, and on the way one of them got out to buy a newspaper. As he was a long time coming back, the taxi continued its journey without him. The "newspaper addict" was the only one who did not get killed in the accident. He now lives in Petach Tiqva). Chaim hovered between life and death for several days in a hospital in Cluj before he died. Chaim was aware of his critical condition and asked a member of the burial society to have pity on his family and not to ask for an exorbitant burial fee. "True," he admitted, "I did a lot of business in the cattle trade, but I am leaving my family practically nothing." And indeed, his widow made a scanty living.

Chaim and his wife, Shifra, (Jenka), had four children. Two died in infancy. Another daughter, Beila, died at the age of 12 (or 18) of meningitis: she fell ill on *Hoshana Raba* [during the feast of Tabernacles] and died on *Simchat Tora* [the next day]. Her father, who was a voluntary member of the burial society in Nasaud, took care of her burial himself.

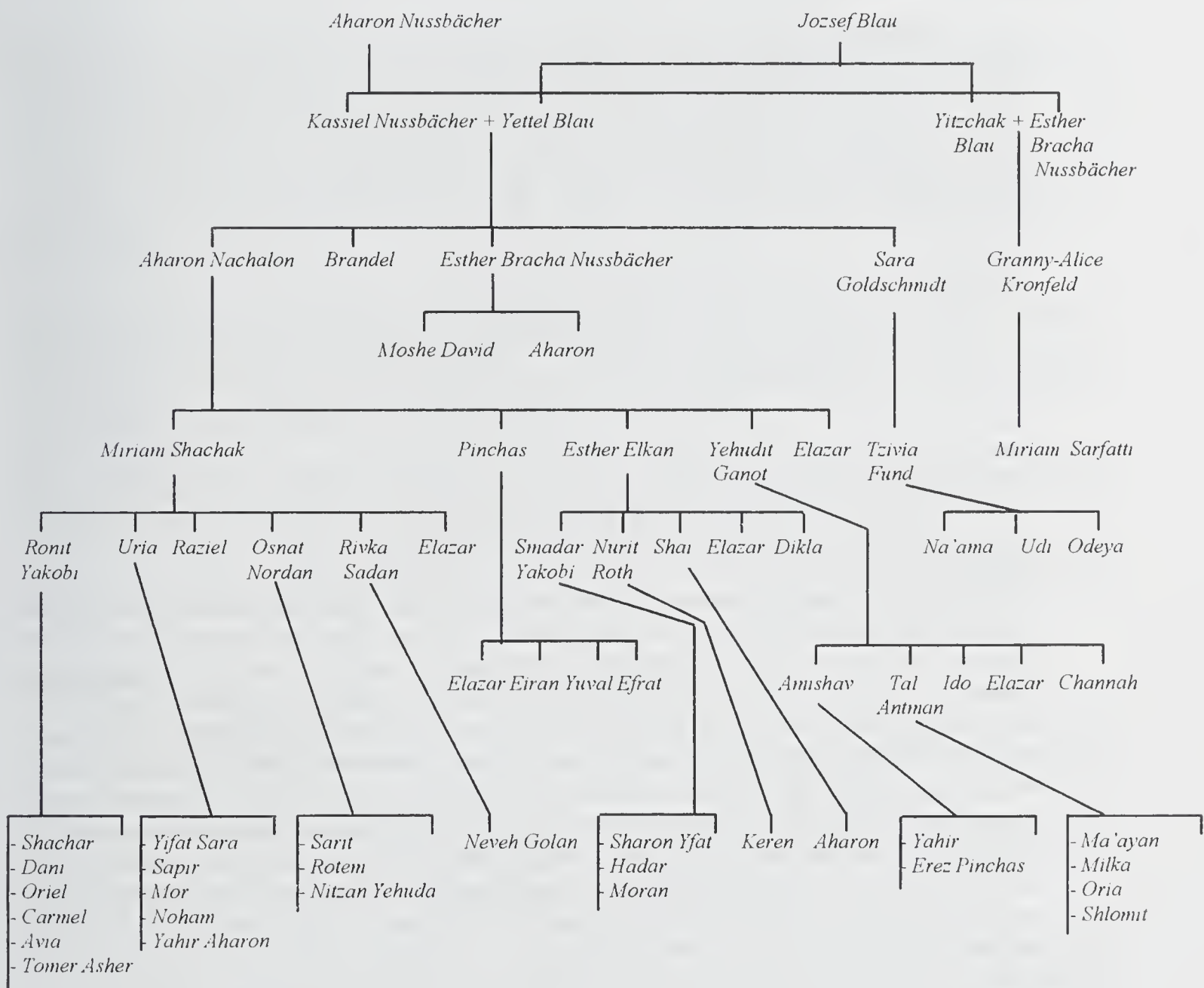
Their son, Mendel, suffered from epilepsy ever since he was struck on the head by a kick from a horse. His illness incapacitated him considerably, and in his youth always had to have someone with him (His cousin, Ze'ev the son of Leibi, served as his companion). After his physical condition improved, he earned his living by basket weaving, married and had children. Mendel lived in Cluj and perished in the Holocaust (probably in Auschwitz), together with his immediate family and his mother, and there is no one who remembers the names of his children!

Chapter 8

Aharon Nachalon in Exile

The marriage ties between the Nussbächer and the Blau families

Aharon Nachalon is a “double” cousin to Granny, because a brother and sister of the Blau family married a sister and a brother of the Nussbächer family. Yitzchak Blau married Esther Bracha Nussbächer (my grandparents); Yettel Blau married Kassiel Nussbächer.



Note: This is only a part of the family tree; for the full family tree see p.150

Kassiel and Yettel Nussbächer

Kassiel and Yettel settled in Nasaud, the Nussbächers' place of residence. Their firstborn son was born in 1911 and was called Aharon after his grandfather. Two years later they had a daughter Brandel (Brainci), who died at the age of 4. In the year 1915 saw the birth of Esther Bracha (Buki), who was called after Kassiel's sister who died young (Granny's mother, my grandmother. At least 4 girls in the family were called after my grandmother, and they all perished in the Holocaust).

As mentioned, Kassiel headed the family business after the death of his father Aharon, dealing in tobacco, strong drink and salt. Kassiel, too, had the honor of being the head of the Nasaud community like his father before him.

World War I - Nasaud

Nasaud, like the whole of Transylvania, was part of Hungary at the beginning of the century. The ruling class was Hungarian but the general population was on the whole Romanian. The High school in Nasaud was an important Romanian cultural center, and the city itself was one of the focal points of Romanian nationalism in Transylvania.

In 1916, in the middle of the war, the “central states” (Germany and Austro-Hungary) invaded Romania, and Nasaud was one of the bases of this invasion. (Aharon still remembers the German soldiers with their characteristic hats - “Roman helmets”, and their heavy cars). The Hungarian government was glad of the opportunity that came its way, and offered the use of the Romanian High School as a military hospital behind the lines for the invading armies. Aharon tells the following story:

One Sabbath during morning prayers, some people came to the synagogue and told my father: “There are wounded Jewish soldiers in the Romanian High School”. Father immediately folded his prayer shawl and said to me: “Ahrele, let’s go home.” On the way he answered my question: “We’ll ask Mother for the food she has prepared for the Sabbath meal and we’ll take all the food to the wounded soldiers in the hospital.” The little boy’s mind did not readily accept this. “And what are we going to eat?” I asked. “Mother will find something for us. If the worst comes to the worst, we’ll eat *Hallah* [the special bread eaten on the Sabbath] or ordinary bread; the main thing is that the soldiers should have hot kosher food for the Sabbath”. “But it is forbidden to carry in the street”, I interjected in the final hope of saving the food for ourselves, because in our city there was no *eruv* [an arrangement whereby the act of carrying in the street is permitted] to enable carrying in the street on the Sabbath. Father answered: “You will carry the food. A small child is allowed to carry, I shall just accompany you, and see to it that they let you into the High School.” And indeed, Mother put all the food into two big pots (at least so they seemed to me). As I walked along the street, with a huge pot in each hand, I kept wondering and fearing that I wouldn’t have the strength to get as far as the High School with my heavy load; that Father, with his personal charm and his connections would succeed in opening the gates of this fortress, of this I had not the slightest doubt.

In fact the next picture that impressed itself on my memory is of our giving food to a soldier lying in a bed above which there was a huge statue of the crucifixion; in fear and in horror I cast a stealthy look at him every now and then (the Romanians were orthodox, and among them the worship of the icon - the statue and the figure - was very prevalent). Another image clearly lingering in my mind is that of the wounded soldier radiant with joy that he was privileged to eat hot kosher Sabbath food, and that he could talk to a Jew about his problems and his worries and, through us send greetings to his family. Years later, when we lived in a city where there was an *Eruv* which made it possible to carry on the Sabbath, Father did not allow me to carry in the street: “So that you won’t forget that it is forbidden to carry on the Sabbath”, Father said to me. “Why did you let me carry the food to the wounded soldiers then?” I asked. “For Jewish soldiers I would even now let you carry food on the Sabbath”, Father answered. This time the persistent questioner within me remained silent.

During those years of World War I, Kassiel’s nephew, Matyi Weisz - Aunt Netti’s son (I shall write about her and Matyi in more detail later on) stayed with him for about two years. Matyi was of military age, and the family hoped that if he worked in Kassiel’s business, which, as has been mentioned, enjoyed a government monopoly, he would be able to get out of being called up to the Austro-Hungarian army.

The flight from Nasaud

At the end of 1918, after the defeat of the “central states” including Hungary, and in the midst of the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian kingdom, the Romanians in Nasaud rose up against the Hungarians - the master race that was oppressing them.

Kassiel's business, which was a monopoly by order of the King of Hungary, and was thus identified with the Hungarian regime, became target for the hatred of the Romanians. The tobacco and the strong drink which were rationed because of the war, aroused jealousy. One Saturday night a crowd of Romanians surrounded the house and demanded tobacco and liquor. Ilia was a Romanian of tall stature, who had worked in the family business for many years and had served as a *Shabbos goy* [a non-Jew who, on the Sabbath, performs work for the Jew which he (the Jew) is not permitted to do himself], and had run the business on Sabbaths, since the government monopoly required the business to open on Sabbath days and Jewish holidays. This Ilia incited the mob and encouraged the "revolutionaries" to loot the factory and empty it out. Here is Aharon's description:

Under cover of dark we fled from our home in pairs. I ran away with Uncle Chaim. He had a sack in the top of which were cigarettes and underneath two million kronen (bank notes of that period). The rebelling non-Jews searched the sack; when they began to search more thoroughly my uncle started shouting and screaming and ran off with all his might. I, a seven-year-old, was terribly frightened and ran after him shouting: "Wait for me, Uncle Chaim". I didn't know why he was running away and deserting me. In the end we came to a family relation [Shlomo Nussbächer, a cousin of grandfather Aharon Nussbächer], and there this relative and my uncle hid the sack in a cupboard.

The next day Kassiel and his family fled, never more to return to Nasaud. The family was one of the first victims of Transylvanian anti-Semitism, which sprang from the awakening of an awareness of Romanian nationalism in the area. The monopoly granted by the government which, until that time had been worth a fortune, became financially worthless overnight, and even jeopardized the lives of the family. They fled leaving behind a lot of property: the factory and the warehouse which was stocked full of merchandise in preparation for the winter (for example, hundreds of tons of salt blocks - for cows).

For a number of weeks Kassiel's family found lodgings with relatives (David and Esther Nussbächer) in Bistrita, in the vain hope that things would quieten down, and that they would be able to return to Nasaud. In Bistrita there was no unrest at all, since most of the population were of German origin and the townspeople got together and set up a kind of local civil defense.

The great treasure of two million kronen, a vast treasure in those days, which the family had amassed through hard work for generations, and which Uncle Chaim had saved together with Aharon when they escaped from the mob in Nasaud, drained away within a short time leaving not a trace. As in many cases in that period, the money "evaporated" as a result of inflation and the need to convert the Hungarian kronen into Romanian lei, as Transylvania came under Romanian rule in 1919.

Satu Mare

From Bistrita Kassiel and his family went to Cehul Silvaniei, to Jozsef and Miriam Blau - Yettel's parents. Kassiel succeeded in securing a permit from the Romanian regime which had just conquered Transylvania, to trade in rationed goods, such as kerosene and sugar. The fact that he spoke Romanian, the language of the conquerors in a region where most of the leading businessmen spoke Hungarian, was of considerable help to him in getting a permit. In the end the family settled in Satu Mare (Szatmar) and Kassiel had to build up his source of livelihood afresh.

Kassiel who was very capable, succeeded very well in his new business ventures. He also integrated very well into the community life of the well-known city of Satu Mare, whose Jewish population ran into thousands. Satu Mare of those days impressed itself on the memory of the ten-year-old Aharon. For example, here is how he describes *matzot* [unleavened bread] being baked for the Passover:

On the day before Passover in the afternoon Father told me to put on my very best clothes (which were even better than my Sabbath clothes), because we were going to the Rabbi's house to bake *matzot* for the Passover. The rabbi of the greater community of the city was Rabbi Eliezer Gruenwald of blessed memory, and Father was a boyhood friend of his. In addition to his position as Rabbi, he headed a *Yeshiva* where 300 young men studied; later I had the privilege of studying under him. Father put on his most festive clothes: striped trousers, striped frock coat, a dress coat and a round hat. In the *matzot* bakery beneath the Rabbi's house tens of highly respected Jews had gathered dressed in their very best. There were very few hassidic Jews wearing their *shtreimlech* [traditional fur hats]; apparently the hassidic Jews did their

baking with their own rabbis. When they allocated the various tasks: who should roll out the dough, who should do the kneading, who should shove the dough into the oven and so forth, it turned out that I could not do any of the work as I was not yet “of age”. The Rabbi decided that I could pour the water onto the flour and help with the kneading of the dough. The Rabbi himself wore a *shtreimel* and a black silk coat, and directed the work. The Rabbi also took part in the actual work of rolling out the dough for the *matzot* (as Rabbi Asher had done). Every now and then they would call out “*Matzot* for the sake of fulfilling the *mitzva*”, or again: “The crumbs are the property of no one” (this, because *chametz* [leaven] was forbidden during the Passover).

From the beginning, the sight impressed me greatly: Deeply respected Jews, including the great and renowned Rabbi, dressed in their most splendid garb, working assiduously, swiftly, joyfully enthusiastically, spurring one another on in their work. Yet what I remember quite vividly is their joyous and vociferous singing of the *Hallel* [the festive prayer of praise]. When they finished they began a second and a third time, just as it is related in the *Mishna* (*Pesachim*, 5, 6 - which I had learnt beforehand) concerning the slaughtering of the Passover sacrifice in the forecourt of the Temple. Before my eyes there was the picture of the Israelites slaughtering the Passover sacrifice in the forecourt and reciting the *Hallel* with enormous joy, and reality and vision intermingled. (Afterwards I asked Father whether in the Temple they also wore frock coats and striped trousers...). It was a kind of reflection of the Temple service, and that was why we did the baking at the time when the Passover sacrifice was slaughtered.

When the work was over, as they shared out the *Matzot* equally among all those who had taken part in the work, the person who did the sharing out, claimed that I was not entitled to any of the *Matzot*, since, being a “minor”, I was not going to lead the *Seder* [the festive celebration on the first Passover night]. We went to the Rabbi for his rabbinic ruling, which was that I was entitled to half a portion in return for my subsidiary, but nonetheless essential work. Here again I was in for a surprise: the Rabbi was sitting on a chair and in all his majestic grandeur inspected the lettuce to see that it had no worms. I asked Father whether in the Rabbi’s house there was no one to check the lettuce, so that the Rabbi could sit and learn. At home Father showed me the tractate of Shabbat (119) in the *Gemara* telling how the greatest rabbis worked and labored in preparation for the Sabbath, and similarly the Rabbi was working in preparation for the festival. In the evening Mother and Father noted that I ate the specially prepared *Matzot* with great relish.

Kassiel the man

And now something about Kassiel’s personality, as told by his son Aharon:

I still remember vividly from my childhood, how my father, of blessed memory, bought the four species [the palm branch, the myrtle, the willow branch and the citron fruit], for an exorbitant sum of money, although the community went to considerable trouble to procure the four species for its members (this was a short time after World War I and communications were still disorganized). His friends said to him in my presence: “You’re crazy”. A short while after this a delegate came to the town on behalf of the *Keren Hayesod* [an appeal for the Jewish community in Palestine]. I believe the *Keren Hayesod* was just set up at that time. Father was called up to the reading of the Law and again promised to donate a large sum of money to the *Keren Hayesod*. Once again his friends told him: “You are crazy”. In the emotions of a small child these two crazes seemed interconnected: someone who dearly loves the Land of Israel and is anxious to build the land, donates a large sum of money to the *Keren Hayesod*, and also acquires the four species at a great price. Later when I saw in the Guide for the Perplexed the reason for this commandment in its association with the Land of Israel, I rejoiced as one who had found great spoil, and I congratulated myself on having “concurred with the opinion of the greatest of the great”. Here are the words of Maimonides in the Guide for the Perplexed (Section 3, chapter 43): “And it seems to me that in the four species that are joined to the palm branch is the joy and happiness of having come out of the wilderness, which “is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink” (Numbers, 20, 5), to a land of fruit trees and rivers. Therefore, to commemorate this, we are to take the finest of its fruit, that which has the best aroma, and the loveliest of leaves, as well as the pleasantest of its herbs, that is: the willow by the stream. And these four species include three things: firstly, their plentiful existence in the Land of Israel at that time...”. These four species

are intended to remind us of our exodus from the wilderness into our own land, a populated land, a land of trees and plants; and by taking them we are to be reminded of our settling there.

All his life Kassiel aspired to make *Aliya*. To make it easier to leave his place of residence, he never built or bought a house - either in Nasaud or in Satu Mare. In his home and through his actions Kassiel educated his son Aharon towards Zionism.

Yeshiva education in Satu Mare was not Zionist oriented (to say the least), and was opposed to *Aliya*. Throughout Transylvania Zionist *Yeshivot* did not exist and had never been heard of. One of his business journeys brought Kassiel to Vienna in Austria where he met young religious Jews who belonged to a youth movement, young people who on the one hand were observant, and yet were educated, involved in public life, German speaking and wore modern dress. It was from these young men that Kassiel heard for the first time of the *Yeshivot* of Rabbi Breuer and Rabbi Hoffmann in Frankfurt, Germany, where secular subjects were taught in addition to religious studies, and where some even went to university.

Kassiel was highly impressed by the “*Tora im Derech Eretz*” [the integration of religious and secular studies] approach, and he returned home with the books of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who had initiated this philosophy. This was an approach after his heart, suiting his own way of life: a big businessman, a Jewish scholar, a man with a liberal education who was interested in world affairs. Kassiel told his son Aharon that he planned to send him to Frankfurt when he was a little older.

Kassiel's death

These plans were cut short with Kassiel's sudden death on the 13th of Av 5682 (1922). At the time Aharon was 11 years old, his sister, Buki (Esther Bracha), was about 7 and their mother Yettel aged 33 was pregnant. After the birth of Sara (Surika, now Goldschmidt), Yettel and her fatherless children went to live with her parents, Miriam and Jozsef Blau in Cehul Silvaniei.

With the death of the father the family became impoverished, and underwent a transition from great comfort to a state of financial dependence on their elderly parents. In due course Yettel found a small source of income; she bought wool which the farmers' wives in the region spun, and sold it to the women in the town. Her profit was minimal, but at least it provided some small income.

Yettel was very particular to give money to charity secretly although she hardly made a living. When poor peddlers went from door to door offering their wares, Yettel always gave them something, buying from them items of haberdashery which she didn't really need. Yettel, who was modest in all her ways, did not take part in the fund-raising dinners that the women in the community organized, but she never forgot to send her share to the women who did the organizing.

The Yeshiva in Huedin

Before he was 13 years old Aharon left the *Heder* in Cehul Silvaniei where he had been learning, and went to learn in a Yeshiva far from home. Uncle Moshe (Kitchi's father) accompanied him to the Yeshiva in Huedin in Cluj County. On the way Uncle Moshe tried to convince Aharon to change his destination and travel to Frankfurt - in accordance with the spiritual will and testament of his father Kassiel. Aharon, however, insisted that he was too young to travel to Frankfurt and so they went on to the Yeshiva in Huedin.

The pain of (not having) Tephillin

In Huedin, far from his family, Aharon became *Bar Mitzva* [attained the age of 13, the age at which he was no longer a minor]. Acquiring *Tephillin*, too, involved a lot of aggravation. Aharon tells us:

Before my *Bar Mitzva* my dear mother made enquiries about buying *Tephillin* for me. An elderly uncle who was knowledgeable, [Reb Yehuda Leib Roth, a brother of Grandmother Miriam Blau, who lived in Satu Mare, and was terribly poor. When Aharon came to learn there, he was also a good messenger, bringing Reb Yehuda donations of money from his sister - Grandmother Miriam] explained to my mother: There are simple cheap *Tephillin* which are fit for use only when there is no other option. There are mediocre *Tephillin*, where the cases are made of one piece of hide and are not glued together, and these are fit for use without any

doubt. And then there are *Tephillin* which are of an exceptionally superior quality, whose cases are made of one piece of hide, - strong hide - the hide of an ox. Now these *Tephillin* are very expensive compared to the others. Also, there were in the town two scribes: one was an ordinary scribe, and the other was well known as an expert and G-d-fearing scribe. People used to say that before writing the Divine name he would immerse himself in the *Mikve*. The *Tephillin* of this specialist scribe were particularly expensive.

Mother took care to order my *Tephillin* from this scribe, and insisted that they should be of the hide of an ox. Despite my tender age, I was aware of our financial situation, and I suggested to Mother that she buy the cheaper *Tephillin*. I claimed that she was not obliged to expend on my *Tephillin* a sum of money that was enough to provide for our family for a month. Mother insisted, saying: "If necessary we will cut down on other expenses, but on no account do I want to be miserly when it comes to your *Tephillin*".

When I left for the Yeshiva the *Tephillin* were not yet ready. The scribe defended himself by saying that he did not work hurriedly or without adequate preparation, and he would not commit himself to a prearranged schedule. Thus I reached the age of *Bar Mitzva* without a pair of *Tephillin* of my own. Until my *Tephillin* arrived I had to rely on the possibility of borrowing the *Tephillin* from a boy who did not come to morning prayers in the Yeshiva because of illness or because he had not woken up in time. It happened more than once that the owner of the *Tephillin* turned up and I had to take them off and return them to their owner; and sometimes I was treated to a telling-off for taking *Tephillin* that were not mine. Some friends who sympathized with me tried to help; they told me that the Rabbi's son (the Rabbi was also the Head of the Yeshiva, as was the custom in the Hungarian Yeshivot) used to get up late since he stayed up late at night learning. The Rabbi's son agreed that I should use his *Tephillin*, but sometimes he changed his practice and appeared in the middle of the service, and again I had to take them off in the middle and give them back to their owners. It was very painful for me that just during the first months when I laid *Tephillin* I should have to undergo the torment of not having *Tephillin* of my own, and I sometimes had to put up with the ensuing degradation. In my heart I bore a grudge against the scribe who had not finished the *Tephillin* in time so that my mother could send them to me. My grudge against him did not subside even when at long last I had the pleasure of receiving the *Tephillin* from home and I could say my prayers attired in my very own superior quality *Tephillin*.

Twenty years later Aharon forgave the scribe. And this is how it came about: during the early days in Sdeh Eliyahu, Aharon's *Tephillin* disappeared in the field together with his hamper, apparently a jackal had got hold of them. After several weeks the *Tephillin* were found in a clump of bushes, but without their leather straps. This is Aharon's story:

When the *Tephillin* were recovered from the jackal's jaws, and I realized that thanks to the scribe's thorough and reliable work, and thanks to the superior quality of the cases, the parchment and the script, the *Tephillin* withstood the test, and the jackal's teeth did not damage them, I asked the scribe's forgiveness for my unjustified grudge against him. Because of my mother's dedication and the expertise of the scribe Reb Zalman Leib, I had the privilege of owning a pair of *Tephillin* that neither the fangs of the jackal nor the teeth of time could overpower.

The first experience of Zionism

Aharon was already Bar Mitzva, but he still had the curiosity of a child. He was attracted to trains and used to go and look at them. He was familiar with the quiet railway station of Cehul Silvaniei, which was a terminal, and only two trains entered the station every day. Huedin was also only a small town, but it was a busy railway junction: all kinds of trains, freight trains, passenger trains, and even the famed and splendid "Orient Express" that crossed the whole of Europe from Paris to Istanbul, called there.

Once Aharon heard one of the Yeshiva boys, one who had leanings towards Zionism, say that an important delegate from the "Jewish State in the making" would pass through the town by train. This is how Aharon describes the meeting:

It was winter and fewer than a dozen men were standing and waiting on the station platform. The Orient Express drew up alongside the group, and at the coach door there appeared a man

wearing a smart suit, sporting a small fashionable beard, with silver gray hair and a charming smile: Nahum Sokolov. In his honor the express train stopped for five whole minutes. One of the Jews greeted him in Yiddish with emotion in his voice. Sokolov answered, and wished those present that the great dream of the Jewish people might become reality. A few moments of excitement, a whistle, and the train continued on its way. (Because of this incident Aharon was almost thrown out of the Yeshiva).

After half a year Aharon had to leave the Yeshiva in Huedin because the families where he ate his meals certain days of the week, ran into financial straits. (In those days, impecunious Yeshiva boys used to eat at the home of a different family each day of the week on a regular basis). The community in Huedin numbered only a few hundred Jews, and the financial burden imposed by the Yeshiva students proved too heavy for the town.

Rabbi Gruenwald's Yeshiva in Satu Mare

Aharon moved to Satu Mare to the renowned Yeshiva of Rabbi Eliezer David Gruenwald (the brother of Rabbi Moshe Gruenwald, the head of the Yeshiva of Chust where his father Kassiel had learnt before him), which was the largest Yeshiva in Transylvania, and one of the largest in Hungary. In Satu Mare, too, he ate with families according to fixed days, but here things were simpler because this was a large community which had grateful memories of his father. Aharon also had another special privilege: a highly respected Jew (actually the head of the community), an old friend of his father's, invited him to eat two days a week, one being the Sabbath. After two years of this arrangement the community organized daily cooked meals for the Yeshiva students. Once, when the boys complained about the quality and the quantity of the meals, they sent Aharon to this man to explain what was bothering the boys. This was Aharon's first public office.

Aharon remembers with great affection the head of the Yeshiva, Rabbi Gruenwald, who himself used to teach 300 students three times each day, test them meticulously each Friday (and every Sabbath night on the weekly portion), and at the end of the term examine them on 30 pages of *Gemara* including *Rashi's* commentary together with *Tosaphot* [additions to the Talmud]. There was also the possibility of being tested on Thursday night, after the midnight *Tikun*. This arrangement was made so that boys who wanted to travel home for the Sabbath could leave early on Friday morning. (They used to say that the Rabbi was tired after the midnight *Tikun*, and so the test was easier...).

During the term Aharon hardly traveled home to his family in Cehul Silvaniei. He was a permanent guest in the house of Uncle Moshe and Aunt Esther (Kiesi's parents), in Seini - a distance of half an hour by train. Whenever Aharon went back to the Yeshiva, the aunt who had a heart of gold, would give him roasted goose, and without telling her husband, give him some money as well. Uncle Moshe also gave him money regularly without telling his wife. (Apparently Aharon knew how to keep secrets).

Rabbi Gruenwald died suddenly (in Sivan 5688 - 1928). After his death there was no one to continue as head of the Yeshiva, and the students dispersed.

Back to Cehul Silvaniei

At the end of the summer term in the Yeshiva Aharon returned to Cehul Silvaniei and stayed there a little over two years (August 1928 - November 1930). Aharon found the anti-Zionist atmosphere that prevailed in the region increasingly oppressive, so that he finally reached the conclusion that there was nothing more to keep him in Transylvania. He knew that as long as he continued learning in the local Yeshivot, he would have to go on concealing his Zionist views. Thus, for example, when he wrote an article in a Zionist weekly, he did not dare to sign his name. The mention of words such as "Zionism", "Mizrachi", or even "Agudat Yisrael", even when mentioned disparagingly, were considered an abomination in Satu Mare. Aharon recalls how an emissary from Hebron Yeshiva in the Land of Israel was removed from the platform in the synagogue and almost was attacked physically because he mentioned these words, albeit, deprecatorily!

Being a Zionist, Aharon did not stand any chance of making a favorable match. Aharon was suggested for the daughter of a rich man, but the suggestion fell through as soon as his intention of making *Aliya* became known.

A general education was also considered a flaw. Aharon acquired a general education secretly by his own efforts. A good friend of his who was to take up the position of Rabbi in a neighboring town had to “take a vow” of silence and conceal the fact of his general education. From a professional point of view Transylvania did not hold out a rosy future for Aharon: his only choice was to go to an inferior commercial school, with the prospect of being a salesman or a minor official.

Aharon began to take steps to realize his own and his father’s dream, namely to be accepted at the Yeshiva of Rabbi Hoffmann in Frankfurt on the Main in Germany. The business of registration at the Yeshiva took a long time and in the meantime, on his own and with the help of a friend, (the same Rabbi, the subterfuge Zionist) Aharon improved his German.

Up till the time that he went to Frankfurt Aharon helped his grandfather, Reb Jozsef Blau, in his business. On Thursdays, the day of the fair, the farmers would bring their sacks of grain for sale; the sacks had to be weighed, their contents had to be emptied into a container, and every farmer had to be paid according to the weight and cleanliness of the grain. Once every few weeks, after a sufficient amount of grain had accumulated, they had to send a whole coach loaded with grain to the great city (usually Cluj). In addition to these tasks, Aharon also helped Uncle Armin in his gas station. Sometimes he would travel to the city of Dej to bring kerosene (in barrels) from the refinery (which was owned by Jews). Whenever there was a large consumption of kerosene Uncle Armin would order a container of kerosene (by train), and Aharon saw to the pumping from the container into Uncle Armin's tanks.

One day Aharon sorted out his late father’s papers (until then no one had touched these papers from the time that they had arrived in a big chest together with the furniture from their house in Nasaud). Among the papers Aharon found a written reply from the Hungarian Prime Minister during World War I to his father in connection with Kassiel’s suggestion to create favorable public opinion on the part of American Jewry towards Hungary. (This was before the United States entered the war in 1917 on the side opposing Hungary and her allies). The family immediately destroyed this document, because if it had fallen into the hands of the Romanian authorities, the entire family would doubtlessly have been accused of treason and imprisoned! (There were good grounds for such fears. Everyone still remembered the false charge that led to the arrest in 1919 of Jews living in the villages around Cehul Silvaniei, accusing them of treason by having allegedly acted as spies for Hungary. It seems they had been libeled by the Principal of the school in Cehul Silvaniei. Twenty-one of these Jews, completely innocent were shot).

In a drawer in this chest Aharon found a small treasure: two bank checks made out to his father Kassiel, each to the value of 30,000 kronen, still from the time of Hungarian rule. The chances of cashing the checks were practically nil, since more than ten years had passed since they had been made out and there had been a change of government. With the aid of the bank’s lawyer, a Romanian and a friend of the family, the sum was paid in full and with interest.

Frankfurt - Rabbi Hoffmann’s Yeshiva

In November 1930 Aharon was accepted to the Yeshiva of Rabbi Hoffmann. Before he set out his mother asked him to go to Reb Yoelish of Szatmar for his blessing for the journey. Aharon refused on the grounds that in any case he had no intention of obeying Reb Yoelish’s injunction “not to make *Aliya* to Israel”. His mother traveled to Reb Yoelish herself, and his instructions were: to let Aharon go to Frankfurt but not to let him become a “Rabbi Dr.” (a rabbi with a doctor’s degree), and that he should not make *Aliya* to Israel. When she told him the Rabbi’s words Aharon answered: “I don’t want to be a rabbi at all any more than you do; and to go on *Aliya* I shall try with all my might”.

As soon as he came to Frankfurt Aharon began his Jewish studies in the Yeshiva, and privately - took up secular studies. Within less than a year Aharon successfully passed the German matriculation examinations. This rapid success made a great impression in the Yeshiva (There were boys who studied for 5-6 years before they passed the matriculation exams; others interrupted their Jewish studies in order to pass the exams.), and it entitled him to board in the Yeshiva dormitory. Now Aharon was done with paying rent for a room outside the Yeshiva, and instead of taking private lessons, he now tutored. His financial position improved, and he was no longer dependent on his mother. After another year Aharon took the final exams and was awarded a full matriculation certificate.

After the festival of Purim (in the spring of 1933), in response to the request of his mother and his grandfather, Aharon returned to Cehul Silvaniei to settle the matter of his military service so as not to be considered a deserter from the Romanian army. Anyone who needed to be bribed was paid off, and everything went off as planned: Aharon appeared before a military committee and answered questions; the town secretary testified to the fact that Aharon was the sole supporter of his widowed mother and his two sisters; the army doctor who examined him from head to foot (in honor of the occasion he was clean-shaven), and wrote a medical report in accordance with the sum of money that he had been paid. The result was that Aharon was exempted from military service.

Emigration to Israel

While Aharon was in Cehul Silvaniei the anti-Jewish laws began in Germany.

Hitler came to power in Germany on 30.1.1933, and already two months later, on 1.4.1933, the Nazi party organized the first great anti-Jewish demonstration. The organizers of the demonstration called for a boycott of shops owned by the Jews; shops and many houses were marked with the Star of David; the windows and doors were defaced with anti-Semitic caricatures and drawings, and boycott guards were stationed near the buildings. The boycott was canceled after two days because of world opinion and also because it was detrimental to the economy of Germany.

In the wake of the measures taken against German Jewry, the British allocated to the Jewish Agency one thousand immigration permits (certificates) to Israel, for *Halutzim* [young Jewish men and women trained for agricultural work in Israel - Palestine]. When Aharon read this notice in *Uj Kelet* (a Hungarian daily Jewish-Zionist newspaper. The Hungarian pro-Nazi authorities closed down the paper in 1940. The paper re-appeared in Israel in 1948, where it appears to this day), he hoped that he would immediately be granted such a certificate which would open to him the gates of Israel which had been closed by the British. Aharon knew that in the whole of Germany there were not one thousand *Halutzim* (in the *Halutz Hakelali* there were maybe 150 members, and in the *Brith Hahalutzim Hadati'im - Buchad* - the religious *Halutzim* there were altogether 30 - 35 members). Aharon reckoned that even if there were more candidates in addition to these *Halutzim*, they would be people like himself, who had not undergone *Hachshara* [training], and they would therefore have no advantage over himself. Furthermore, Aharon conjectured that his connections with his Rabbi and teacher, the head of the Yeshiva, Rabbi Hoffmann, would be of help to him in attaining the much-desired certificate. (Rabbi Hoffmann was a long-standing member of the Mizrachi [the centrist Zionist political party and movement of Orthodox Jews] who held an important post: after Hitler's rise, the German Jews were compelled to be affiliated to an umbrella organization that included all the sects and divisions; Rabbi Hoffmann was a member of the governing board of all German Jewry, a board which numbered 4-5 members). It was out of these considerations that Aharon decided to return to Germany, despite rising anti-Semitism, the anti-Jewish laws and Hitler's having come to power. The Jews of Cehul Silvaniei, who did not know the real reason for his return to Germany, thought he was out of his mind. Aharon took leave of the town, his acquaintances, his relatives, his family and his mother, and never imagined that he would never see them again.

By May 1933 Aharon was already back in Frankfurt, and immediately set about getting the certificate. A problem arose: the permits were intended for *Halutzim*, and since Aharon had not been in *Hachshara* he did not come under the category of *Halutz*. Rabbi Hoffmann briefed Aharon in filling out the form: "You know Hebrew (Aharon had got a grade of "Excellent" in his exams); your grandfather had a farm, so you know all about agriculture". These qualifications, and the Rabbi's personal recommendation, led to Aharon receiving an immigration permit in August 1933.

There remained only one obstacle: Aharon did not have a penny for traveling expenses (as a matter of fact, on the application form he had stated that he had money for the fare, but he had written this because he feared that the admission of having no fare money was liable to hold up his receiving the certificate). Aharon went back to Rabbi Hoffmann, who solved the problem with a few telephone calls. At the same time Rabbi Hoffmann suggested that he put off his emigration for half a year, and qualify as a rabbi. The suggestion was both tempting and flattering, but on reflection Aharon decided against it, "in order to go ahead in participating in the building of the Land of Israel, which was not an empty slogan, but a genuine desire and a forceful aspiration". In September 1933, in the week of *Rosh Hashana* [the Jewish New Year], Aharon reached the port of Haifa. He was the first member of the extended family to reach the Land of Israel.

Chapter 9

The Pioneering Activity of Aharon and Shulamit Nachalon

In Kibbutz Rodges

Aharon had the intention of living in Israel as a *Halutz* and to be part of a kibbutz. At the beginning of the thirties there was only one religious kibbutz in Israel: Kibbutz Rodges, near Petach Tiqva (Rodges - after the small German village where the first training of the *Poel HaMizrachi* took place. In 1941 the members of Kibbutz Rodges moved to their permanent abode, and set up Kibbutz Yavne). As long ago as 1929, in Cehul Silvaniei, Aharon had picked up the name Rodges. The occasion was when his good friend, the subterfuge Zionist, had shown him the Jerusalem newspaper, “*Hahed*”, carrying an article by Ernst Simon (later to become the famous professor), on the *Hachshara* in the village of Rodges in Germany. The article told of the objectives of *Hachshara* and its first beginnings, as well as the contact which its members maintain with Rabbi Hoffmann’s Yeshiva.

Aharon traveled from the port of Haifa straight to Kibbutz Rodges. In Rodges, however, he was in for a great disappointment, when he was told that there was no room for him at the kibbutz. Aharon was not even invited to stay until after *Rosh Hashana*... He went straight back to Haifa and became a bricklayer, and in 1934 he was appointed secretary of the Haifa branch of the *Poel HaMizrachi*. It was only in January 1935 that Aharon was at long last admitted to Kibbutz Rodges.

The first mission

It was not long before Aharon became conspicuous by virtue of his qualities. Already in May of the same year the inexperienced kibbutznik, who had received no previous training, and for whom no room could be found in Rodges for such a long time, was sent on an important job together with Michael Hazani (at that time a simple settler in Kfar Yavetz, and later a minister in the Israeli government).

The leaders of Religious Zionism in Israel were interested in extending and enhancing the religious settlement in the country. But there was the rub, the institutions in charge of settlement were not at all interested in religious settlement, and they sent their leaders from pillar to post. The situation being as it was, the Religious Zionist leaders decided to settle even if it meant doing so without the blessing of the institutions in charge of settlement. In May 1935 Aharon and Hazani were sent to check out the possibilities for a religious settlement in the valley of Beit She’an.

Aharon and Hazani reached Kibbutz Beit Alpha and very soon discovered that contrary to what the settlement institutions had said there were indeed the serious beginnings of a settlement there. Near Kibbutz Beit Alpha they found the advance group of Kibbutz Tel Amal (which was later to become Kibbutz Nir David, the first kibbutz to be set up under the “Wall and Tower” principle). The people of Tel Amal belonged to the “correct” party and so they were given the possibility of settling and they were also given the necessary assistance.

This was Aharon’s first mission, and it marked the beginning of his settlement activity. He was active in this sphere until after the War of Independence.

The settlement in Beit She'an

In spite of the extensive purchase of land by the Jewish National Fund (JNF) in the Beit She'an valley, the Jewish Agency Settlement Department did not allow a body representing the *Poel HaMizrachi* to settle there. In March 1936, in the face of this hostile attitude, the *Halutzim* of the *Poel HaMizrachi* established a settlement, Beit Yehuda, (where Kibbutz Mesilot is today), on land which they had purchased privately without the assistance of the institutes for settlement. Aharon, who held the office of coordinator of all matters concerning the movement's settlements, was very active in establishing Beit Yehuda.

The JNF, opposing this settlement, prevented the *Hagana* [the Jewish underground army] from offering them assistance, and the onus of guarding the place fell entirely on the shoulders of the ten founding members. On 19.4.1936, about a month after its establishment, on the day when the "events of 1936-1939" broke out, the founding members hastily left Beit Yehuda on the instructions of the *Hagana*, and fled to Beit Alpha. Before they had managed to get very far, the Arabs burned down the place. The riotous events continued and there was no possibility of re-establishing Beit Yehuda. The ten founding members remained in Beit Alpha until Tirat Zvi was established, and they used the time to gain expertise in various branches of agriculture.

Aharon and his comrades learnt a number of lessons from their short experience as settlers. They understood that it was impossible to establish a settlement without the help of the neighboring settlements and without the cooperation and assistance of the institutes for settlement. Moreover, from his close acquaintance with the settlements in Gush Harod (Ein Harod, Beit Alpha and others), Aharon came to the conclusion that only an unbroken line of religious settlements would enable the creation of a life style that was in keeping with their philosophy. A continuity of settlements would also make for the possibility of establishing additional settlements with less difficulty. As a direct result of these conclusions, Aharon suggested that they demand a "complex" of several *Poel Mizrachi* settlements, in the Beit She'an valley (and this at a time when, as yet, not a single settlement had been established!). Aharon's idea was accepted by the Religious Kibbutz Organization in 1936, and less than a year later, in Tamuz 5697 (1937), Tirat Zvi was founded - the first kibbutz of the Religious Kibbutz complex in Beit She'an. (Later, the Religious Kibbutz organization adopted a policy based on this philosophy both in the Negev and in Gush Etzion).

Tirat Zvi was established in the south of the Beit She'an valley, isolated and far from any Jewish settlement, in a very dangerous place from the security point of view and in contradiction to the recommendations of the "Peel Commission". In 1936 the British Government appointed the Peel Commission to examine the background which led to the "events" that began in Israel that same year. Among other things, the Peel Commission recommended that the country should be divided into a Jewish state and an Arab state. The south of the Beit She'an valley was to be in the Arab part, and this was one of the considerations that led the Jewish Agency to encourage the establishment of settlements precisely there). Aharon, who did a great deal to put the establishment of this settlement into effect, had the privilege of being among those who were sent to boost the forces of the young kibbutz during the first month of its establishment.

Shulamit makes Aliya

In 1934 Kibbutz Rodges took in a group of 60 young people who came from Germany in the Youth *Aliya*. This was the first Religious Youth Division to make *Aliya* with the intention of fulfilling their ambitions as *Halutzim*. The kibbutz, which numbered 60 members, made every effort to absorb all the 60 youngsters, since it was the only religious kibbutz that was capable of training young people for life on a kibbutz. Shulamit, aged 15, Aharon's future wife was among them. The newcomers studied half day and worked half day, which was the routine format for Youth Aliya. Among other places of work, Shulamit worked as a nurse in the National Health Service in Petach Tiqva.

Kvutzat Arye

At the end of the two years' training in the Aliyat Hanoar, the Religious Youth Division decided to leave Kibbutz Rodges and to become a "Work Division". In those days a nucleus of people who wanted to establish a settlement had first to be a "Work Division" in a well-established settlement; this period was to allow them to become a closely knit social unit, to train them physically, and to

prepare them professionally for the main types of farming. The members of the “Work Division” moved to Kfar Yona (there were new orange groves there which in the summer called for many workers), and they took on the name “Kvutzat Arye” (after Arye - Luz Feilchenfeld, their teacher in the preparatory camp in Germany).

On the explicit instructions of Henriette Szold, who headed the Youth Aliya, Shulamit was sent back to Rodges because she was not yet 17 years old and she had not yet finished her period of *Hachshara*. Henriette Szold decided that because of her ability Shulamit should be allowed to train as a “nurse”.

Hadera

In the meantime winter came and there was no work in the young orange groves of Kfar Yona. Aharon found a more suitable place for Kvutzat Arye, and the group together with Shulamit moved to Hadera. The members of the group lived together and did all kinds of work in the area. This was kibbutz life without settling. Shulamit worked in the vineyard and the orange grove (and also two days in the laundry, where, to her disgust to this day, she had to wash smelly socks by hand...). They lived under difficult conditions, in a time of financial hardship, but they led a lively cultural and social life.

In June 1937 Aharon joined Kvutzat Arye and at the same time continued to take care of matters of settlement for the Religious Kibbutz movement. After a year he was appointed secretary for external affairs of Kvutzat Arye, although he was relatively new to the Kvutza and although he did not belong to the Youth Aliya.

From Hadera to pioneering settlement in the Beit She'an valley

After the large scale attack on the isolated Kibbutz Tirat Zvi by Arab gangs in Adar 5698 (March 1938), the demand for additional Jewish settlements in the south of the Beit She'an valley became doubly cogent. In the end the institutes for settlement agreed that Kvutzat Arye should settle north of Tirat Zvi as soon as the JNF had completed the negotiations regarding the purchase of the land. These were plots of land in the region of Areeda and Sepha that belonged to German Christians of the order of the Templars, and were cultivated by Arab tenant farmers.

The land passed into Jewish hands on 7.5.1939, and for political reasons, this being the period before the proclamation of the “White Paper”, the business of settling had to be done swiftly. (On 17.5.1939 the Mandate Government published the “White Paper”, which set down rules limiting the settlement of Jews in Israel, and curtailing the purchase of land by Jews). The British opposed the establishment of another Jewish settlement in the Beit She'an valley, and the settlers began to act surreptitiously. They explained to the British that they had to guard the property that they had just bought and that they had to irrigate the plantations that the Germans had left behind, (plantations which stretched over hundreds of *dunamim*), and they came to an agreement that a team of 10 members of Kibbutz Tirat Zvi would do the necessary work.

Areeda camp

On 11.5.1939 the first members of Kvutzat Arye, disguised as members of Tirat Zvi, began to prepare the ground. The whole of Kvutzat Arye moved in several stages from Hadera to Areeda, and settled in a temporary camp (which in time was nicknamed the “old camp”), following the “Wall and Tower” principle. Most of the members of the Kvutza moved to Areeda on Lag Beomer 5699, after the British gave in to the pressure that was exerted on them and recognized the Kvutza as an independent settlement that was not to be limited as regards the number of its members. The Jewish Agency, too, which at first had agreed to a settlement comprising only 40 members (because of lack of funds and because of the “large” number of girls who came to Areeda, and who in their opinion were superfluous), ultimately withdrew the limitations it had imposed on the settlement in that place. Shulamit and another girl were the last ones to leave Hadera because they had regular work there in the orange grove.

The Kvutza settled down in the “old camp” in primitive conditions which made day-to-day life extremely difficult. The first year was particularly difficult, especially because of the crowding inside the wall; for security reasons it was forbidden to go outside the wall in the evening, and during the

day only when accompanied by someone carrying arms. The heat in the tents and in the huts which were exposed to the burning sun was oppressive. Because of the danger of malaria they had to be particular to wear suitable clothing from sunset to sunrise: trousers and long-sleeved blouses. (Nevertheless, nearly all them, with one or two exceptions, did fall ill with malaria). The nets under which they slept at night also added to their discomfort, and there were hot nights when they poured water over the nets in order to cool, in some measure, the stifling air. Needless to say, fans, coolers of any kind, and, of course, air conditioners did not exist.

The girls' working conditions were especially hard. They had to cook in a small kitchen, on kerosene stoves. They washed the sweaty clothes of the members of the Kvutza by hand; the fuel used for heating the oven was wood. At first they had to bring the water in pitchers from the spring, which was in the middle of Areeda. Shulamit remembers that when working in the kitchen, she would bring the water on a donkey's back in two milk cans. After some time a pump was put up, and the water was piped to a small water tower.

The relations with the Arabs were far from friendly. There was the theft of agricultural produce, and there were quarrels when the herds of the Arabs grazed in the orange groves which were fenced off or in the fields which had been sown. The allocation of water to the fields also gave rise to contention. This situation called for uninterrupted watch, in addition to armed guards for those working in the fields and in the camp itself, and tied down one quarter of the working force in the Kvutza.

The Beit She'an valley is blessed with many springs, which from time immemorial have served for irrigation. Every spring has its own watering basin, and the water is allocated on a rota basis among the owners of the fields, in accordance with the extent of each property. The water allocation caused a lot of disputes with the Arab neighbors. One of the first quarrels broke out when the Kvutza asked for the rota for the Areeda basin to be changed. The members of the Kvutza used to get their water five and a half days each week: from Friday noon till Wednesday, including the Sabbath. The regional officer who was stationed in Beit She'an got what he was supposed to get and changed the order of the allocation so that the Kvutza got their water from Sunday until Friday noon. When the Arabs complained to the regional officer about the change, he answered them saying that the Jews pray on the Sabbath and so they could not water their fields on that day. When the Arabs replied that they too prayed (on Friday), the officer, a Moslem, was the only one who could tell them in reply that he had never seen them at prayer in the mosque...)

The difficult physical conditions, the frail security situation and financial straits, somewhat delayed the first weddings in Kvutzat Arye, all of whose 60 members, men and women, were single. The first wedding took place in Adar 5700 (1940). Aharon and Shulamit were married in Sivan of that same year.

Sdeh Eliyahu

Not long after settling in Areeda, a few hundred meters from the "old camp", a suitable site was found for the permanent settlement of the Kvutza. At the place that it was decided should be the permanent settlement there was a group of Bedouin tents, although the site had been purchased free of tenancy. The long drawn out negotiations regarding compensation held up the building of the new camp. (Its purpose was, of course, kept a secret; otherwise the Arabs would be living there to this day - as one of them confirmed later).

Until the permanent camp was ready to house the members of the Kvutza, the new dining hall, which was in the process of being built and did not yet have a tiled floor, served as sleeping quarters for about twenty young men from Italy. These boys wanted to join Kvutzat Arye, and in preparation for kibbutz life they had been trained by two kibbutzniks, "veteran" *olim* [immigrants] from Italy. One of these two leaders was a member of the neighboring Kibbutz Tirat Zvi, by the name of Gad Ben Ammi Sarfatti - my future father-in-law. In an article that my father-in-law wrote ("Memories of Fifty Years Ago") he describes the new dining room. Here is what he says:

At that time [5702 - 1942] Kvutzat Sdeh Eliyahu was in the process of transition from the initial camp to the final camp, and for a while the Italian boys together with their leaders were put up in a hut that was later to become the new dining room. The floor was just loose soil; the winds of Beit She'an penetrated through all kinds of cracks and swept up the dust which got into our beds and clothes, and even into our eyes and noses. In this same future dining hall, the youngsters had their lessons - both from members of the kibbutz and from us, their leaders.

At the end of 1942 the twelve children of Kvutzat Arye (including Miriam, Aharon and Shulamit's eldest daughter), were the first to move into their new quarters in an organized manner. It was almost four years after the beginning of the settlement in Areeda, that the last of its members came to their permanent camp (1943). Only at the end of this period of time did they at long last have running water! At the same time as their transfer to the new camp, Kvutzat Arye was given the name Sdeh Eliyahu by the UJA, after Rabbi Eliyahu Gutmacher. (Rabbi Eliyahu Gutmacher lived in Poland between the years 1795 - 1874, and was one of the first rabbis to support working the land and settlement in Israel).

Aharon and Shulamit

Aharon served as coordinator of the kibbutz. In 5702 (1942) he was sent to set up the regional financial organization of the kibbutzim of Beit She'an, which was later known as the "Beit She'an Kibbutz Organization". This was the first financial organization that covered both religious and non-religious settlements, and Aharon directed it until 1948. Because he was held in such high esteem Aharon managed to see to it that the organization did not engage in any activities on the Sabbath and on festivals and did not deal in ritually forbidden food. The precedent set by Aharon was maintained by all the financial organizations that were subsequently set up between religious and non-religious institutions. With the passage of the years Aharon was appointed to many public posts in the kibbutz and the secretariat of the religious kibbutzim, including being a delegate of the *Poel HaMizrachi* in the Agricultural Bank. (His two banker grandfathers would no doubt have derived great pleasure at seeing their grandson in his fiscal reincarnation in the Land of Israel!). Between one public office and the next Aharon worked on the kibbutz in the fields and in the hen house.

Aharon contributed a great deal towards the way in which religious observance by individual members of the kibbutz was implemented. Thus, for example, if in the early days of the kibbutz one member would recite the *Kiddush* [sanctification] on the Sabbath for the entire kibbutz, now, as a result of Aharon's initiative, every family receives wine and *Hallah* [the festive bread] and recites the *Kiddush* itself. He also saw to it that every member received the four species for the festival of Tabernacles. The high-quality *Tephillin* that every child in the kibbutz is awarded are the result of Aharon's endeavors. Achievements which are taken for granted, aroused a great deal of argument in the past.

At the age of 56 Aharon began to study law at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and gained his B.A. and M.A. degrees. While studying, Aharon worked at the Institute for the Research of Hebrew Law doing research on community regulations, for he saw in these the prototype for the authority of the Kibbutz General Assembly and its institutions. In Adar II 5795 (1995), when Aharon was 83 years old, the university approved his doctoral thesis the subject of which was "The community and community regulations during the period of the Gaonim, based on their responsa and their pronouncements (Halachic-judiciary elements)".

Aharon and Shulamit raised five children; their eldest, Miriam, followed by Pinchas, Esther, Judith and Elazar.

Aharon and Shulamit's youngest son, Elazar, fell in the Yom Kippur War, aged 22. On the 16th of Tishre 5734 (1973), the helicopter (a "Yassur" - Sikorski), designed for electronic warfare, which he was flying, was hit by an Egyptian missile. As the helicopter fell, two of the crew baled out and escaped. The remaining eight, including Elazar were killed. May their souls rest in peace.

Pinchas (Pinni) is married to Shoshana (Shoshi) Ben Meir, and they live in Ramat Gan, with their four children. Judith is married to Moshe Ganot, and they live with their five children in the settlement Elazar (!) in Gush Etzyon. Two of Aharon and Shulamit's daughters - Miriam and Esther - are carrying on their parents' work and live in Sdeh Eliyahu with their families.

Aharon and Shulamit have been granted to see their great-grandchildren, the sixth generation after Aharon Nussbächer - the great merchant and the head of the Nasaud community, and Jozsef Blau - the well-to-do tenant farmer of Hodod.

Chapter 10

Cehul Silvaniei and Zionism

Immigration from Cehul Silvaniei to Israel was negligible, and in Salaj the opposition to Zionism was vehement, because of the stand taken by the rabbis who saw in Zionism a movement leading to reform Judaism and a secular culture. During the thirties the attitude to Zionism changed, and this was brought about by three factors: the Jewish newspapers (in Hungarian and in Yiddish) which carried news from Israel and the life which was starting afresh there, made out a good case for Zionism; the Romanian government encouraged the development of a Jewish party, which in time became Judo-Zionist, in order to distance the Jews from identifying with Hungarian culture; the support which leading Jewish authorities in Poland and Lithuania gave to the immigration of religious Jews to Israel led some of the rabbis in Transylvania to change their position regarding Aliya. Close to 30 people from Cehul Silvaniei went on Aliya during this period and many others participated in Zionist activities in the town. This activity reached a climax in 1939, apparently for external reasons, including the worsening political and economic situation of the Jews and apprehension about the dangers lurking ahead.

In the elections for the 17th World Zionist Congress that were held in Cehul Silvaniei in 1931, all the 70 electors of the town who had bought the “Zionist *Shekel*” took part. (Of these, 50 perished in the Holocaust). Armin Blau and his wife Margit, my Aunt Nendi and Dezso Blau of Hodod were among those who took part in these elections. In the elections for the 21st Zionist Congress which were held in 1939 there were already 145 “*Shekel* holders” (of whom 130 exercised their right to vote). In these elections, the last to be held in Cehul Silvaniei, Armin Blau was the chairman of the regional election committee. This positive Zionist activity did not set out to realize its objectives in the short term.

Buki Nussbächer’s Zionist Activity

Buki Nussbächer, Aharon Nachalon’s sister, was active in the “Young *Mizrachi*” movement in Transylvania. Thus, it was Buki who wrote the protocol at the elections that were held in Cehul Silvaniei in 1931 in preparation for the 17th Zionist World Congress. She also took part in Zionist Congresses throughout Transylvania. In 1935, through the tireless efforts of her brother, Buki received an immigration permit to Israel. Her mother, Yettel, and the whole family objected to her making *Aliya*, and the permit, worth more than gold and so hard to come by, expired. So Buki stayed in Cehul Silvaniei. In 1937 Buki married Buni (Avraham) Nussbächer, a distant relative.

Surika makes *Aliya*

Surika, Aharon’s younger sister, was a member of the *Bnei Akiva* movement. Grandfather Jozsef, in whose house she was living, did not approve of his granddaughter belonging to a Zionist youth movement. Grandfather Jozsef’s disapproval would increase every now and then, when visiting preachers would deliver anti-Zionist sermons. Despite his displeasure, Grandfather Jozsef did not stop Surika from being active in *Bnei Akiva*, while her participation had the full approval of her mother Yettel. In 1939 Aharon managed to procure an immigration permit for his 16 year-old sister in the Youth *Aliya*, and she came on *Aliya* in December of the same year, when there was already fear of German torpedo attacks in the Black Sea.

Surika was taken into *Beit Tze’irot Mizrahi* in Jerusalem within the framework of the Youth *Aliya*. There, for two years, together with about 200 refugee girls from Europe, some of them orphans, Surika received training for life in Israel. After that she joined Aharon in Sdch Eliyahu. In the kibbutz she married Dov Goldschmidt and bore him a daughter, Tzivia.

The fate of those who remained in Transylvania

Yettel, as well as Buki and her husband, had indefinite plans to follow Surika to Israel. It was only in 1944, when the situation was already life threatening, that Yettel let her son Aharon know through the Red Cross (during the war postal services with the occupied countries were conducted via the Red Cross), that she wanted to make *Aliya*. Once again Aharon succeeded in getting a permit which was sent to her. Whether the permit reached its destination we shall never know. At all events, it was already too late, and the permit would have been of no avail.

From the time of her marriage to Bumi Nussbächer, Buki lived in the town Negresti in Satu Mare County. Bumi earned his living by running a shoe shop. In 1938 their eldest son, Moshe David, and in 1942, in the middle of the war, their son Aharon was born. After the birth of Aharon, Yettel came to live with her daughter, Buki.

In 1942(?) Bumi was taken off to forced labor. After Passover 5704 (1944), Yettel, her daughter, Buki and her two children were deported to the Satu Mare ghetto. All the Jews in the town, about 500, were deported with them. At the end of Iyar, all the Jews in the Satu Mare ghetto were deported to Auschwitz in six transports. Yettel, aged 54, together with her daughter Esther Bracha (Buki), aged 29, and the two grandchildren, six-year-old Moshe David and two-year-old Aharon were sent to their deaths. Aharon Nachalon and Surika commemorate the 14th of Sivan as the day of their murder. Bumi managed to survive, and after the war he emigrated to the United States, remarried and died there without any children.

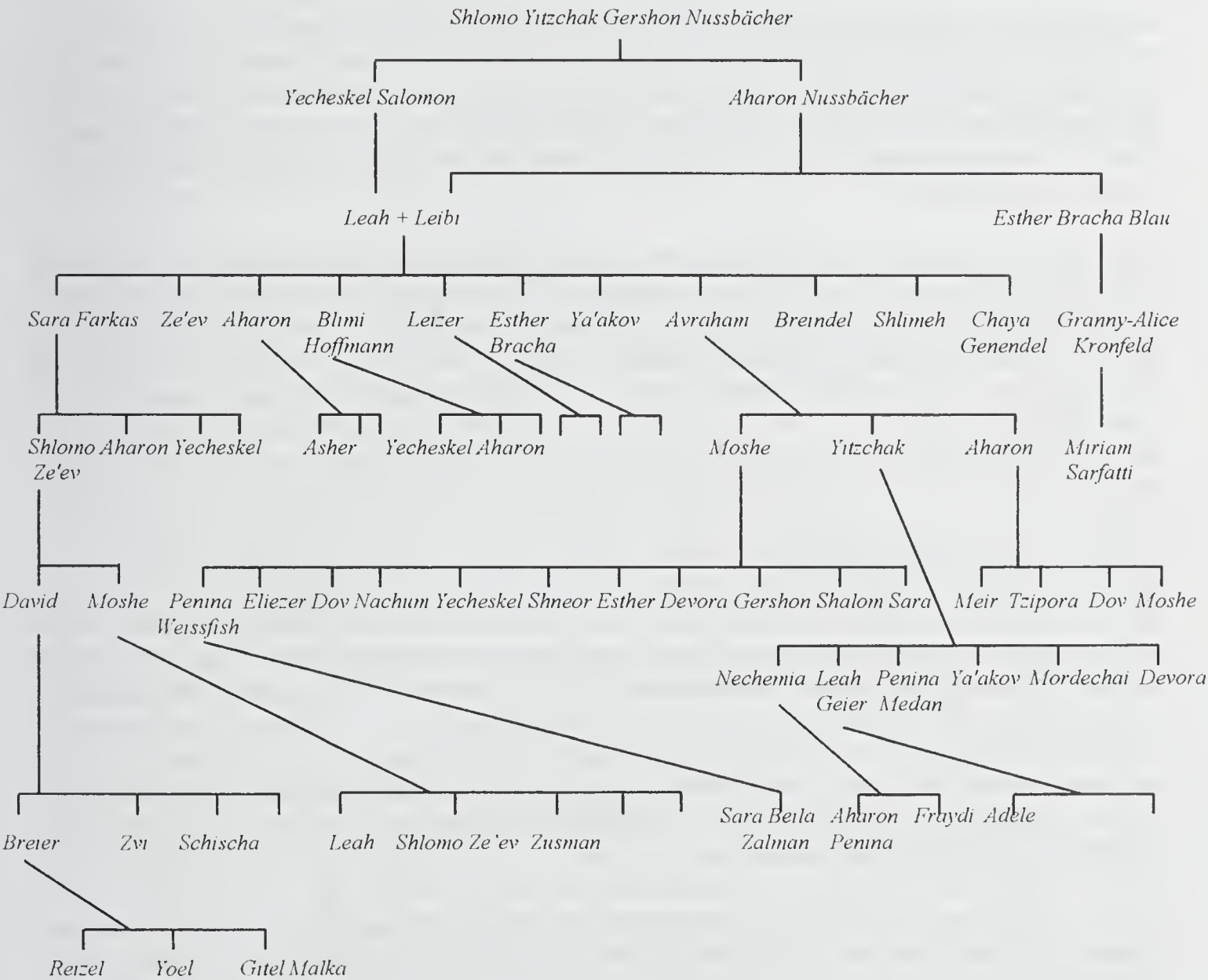
Chapter 11

Avraham Nussbächer's illegal immigration

Leibi and Leah Nussbächer

Leibi Nussbächer, one of the brothers of my Grandmother, Esther Bracha, had 11 sons and daughters. Leibi married Leah Salomon, who was also his cousin: Aharon Nussbächer, Leibi's father, was Yecheskel Nussbächer's brother - Leah's father. (Later Yecheskel Nussbächer changed his name to Yecheskel Salomon, in order to avoid military service, as we have related in Chapter 6 - "Family Nussbächer"). Leibi Nussbächer was therefore Granny's uncle.

Leibi Nussbächer's family tree



Note: This is only a section of the family tree; for a detailed family tree see p.146

Leibi lived in Nasaud all his life. He earned his living by trading in timber and all kinds of building materials, and he ran his business on a large plot of land near his house. (The Jews of Nasaud were conspicuous as traders in timber; the wood they cut down in the surrounding evergreen forests were sawn down in sawmills belonging to Jews). In 1918 when the Romanians in Nasaud rose against the

Hungarian oppressors, Leibi was in no way inconvenienced and ran his business as usual. (This, in contrast to his brother, Kassiel, who, it will be remembered, called forth the wrath of the rioters because he had the monopoly for dealing in strong drink and tobacco, and escaped from Nasaud by the skin of his teeth).

Avraham Nussbächer

Avraham (the son of Leibi) Nussbächer, Granny's cousin, traveled far from home at the age of 14 to learn at a Yeshiva. After two years at the Yeshiva, Avraham went to live in Somcuta Mare, 20 km east of Cehul Silvaniei. His mother, Leah, was born in that town, and the family inherited the grandfathers'house there. In Somcuta Mare Avraham set up a trading concern dealing in timber, similar to that of his father in Nasaud.

In 1937, at the age of 21, Avraham was called up for regular service in the Romanian army, and his job was to move cannons. (In those days the cannons were still drawn by horses). In the summer of 1939 the Romanian army mobilized its reserve troops because of the tense political situation that prevailed in Europe. Avraham, too, was called up to the reserves. (The prospect of war that led to the call-up of reserve troops became a reality: in September of that year Germany invaded Poland; in the wake of this invasion, France and England declared war on Germany, and thus began World War II. At this time Romania did not take part in the fighting).

The decision to make *Aliya*

After the feast of Tabernacles 5700 (October 1939) Avraham was sent to Bistrita, to be demobilized. There while going for a walk on the Sabbath, he heard from a friend about the possibility of emigrating to Israel: a ship that was lying at anchor at the port of Sulina (a small Romanian port on the Black Sea), was to set sail for Israel on Wednesday of that week. Avraham, who had never been a Zionist, decided on the spot to desert from the army and to make *Aliya* in that ship and so be saved from the approaching war.

There was not much time for preparations. On Sunday Avraham traveled to Nasaud to his parents. His father and his elder brother were not prepared to give him money for the expenses on the journey, but a distant relative with Zionist convictions who was present, gladly gave him the necessary sum of money - 20,000 Lei. On that same day Avraham found himself on the train after a hasty farewell from his parents. In the city of Galati he left the train for a river boat (a conventional form of transport) to take him to the harbor city of Sulina on the swampy delta of the Danube. When he reached Sulina he found that he could not board the ship as he had desired, and the ship left without him.

The port city of Sulina

While rowing on the Danube, on the way to Sulina, Avraham met a Jewish young man, a resident of Sulina, who invited him to his parents'house until there was a ship bound for Israel. So Avraham stayed free of charge with one of the few Jewish families in Sulina. (Later, when the city was full of Jewish refugees who also wanted to emigrate to Israel, there was not enough room to put them all up: some filled up the hotels in Sulina, some found shelter in the homes of local inhabitants and some had to sleep under the open sky in the bitter cold of minus 27 degrees centigrade). During his stay in Sulina Avraham prepared his own meals. He cooked mainly potatoes which were cheap and fish of which there was plenty in the port city.

Avraham had to wait more than three months for the ship. In the meantime he was pronounced a deserter, and representatives of the army came at night to look for him in his parents'house in Nasaud.

At this time the *Beitar* movement organized the *Aliya* of thousands of people, in accordance with Ze'ev Jabotinski's idea of "evacuation". This was the "*Af al pi* - despite all" operation for a mass exodus from Europe for fear of their imminent extermination, and to bring them to Israel. As a result of this rescue operation the lives of thousands of Jews were saved on the eve of World War II. Within the framework of "Operation *Af al pi*" arrangements were made for four vessels to sail down the Danube towards Sulina in the autumn of 1939, with Jewish refugees from all over Europe on board.

Some of the refugees began their journey at Bratislava in Czechoslovakia, and sailed on the Danube about 1,800 km; others joined them in Hungary. It was winter and the Danube began to freeze. Only three boats reached Sulina; one of the ships got stuck in the ice, and their passengers, who were Austrian citizens, were sent back to their country. The last boat to arrive, an ancient river boat carrying 500-600 passengers, arrived at the end of December, the day before the river froze.

Sulina filled up with refugees who arrived “under their own steam” from all parts of Romania. The Romanian authorities prevented the refugees who arrived in the boats from embarking. The miserable passengers had to wait in the small boats under impossible conditions, with great overcrowding and in the bitter cold, until they were allowed to board a ship that would take them to Israel. Information about the severe conditions in which the immigrants were accommodated also reached the Romanian press, and rumors spread that there were cases of disaster in Sulina. This news worried the Nussbächer family greatly, and Ze’ev, Avraham’s elder brother, was sent to look for him. Ze’ev only got as far as Galati because the Danube was frozen and made the transit to Sulina impossible.

The illegal immigrant ship Sakaria

The representatives of *Beitar* had difficulty in finding a ship to take the refugees from Sulina to Israel. The British warned the Greek government (most of the ships on these voyages belonged to Greek companies) against having any part, even indirectly, in illegal immigration. In the end the representatives of *Beitar* succeeded in hiring an old Turkish coal carrier called Sakaria.

The Sakaria lay at anchor for more than a month and a half off the port of Sulina outside Romanian territorial waters. The owners of the ship, who realized that the deal was not altogether legal, exploited the *Beitar* people and raised the cost of hiring the ship from 6,750 to 17,000 pounds sterling (funds that were for the most part non-existent and were raised with great difficulty). During the waiting period the Romanians created difficulties. In addition, the police and the customs people demanded bribes. Each one demanded and received bribes in keeping with his importance and rank, as was customary in the corrupt Romanian regime.

As soon as they had hired the ship, a hundred young members of *Beitar* began refurbishing the old cargo vessel to make her suitable for carrying passengers. Within a few days they constructed sleeping racks in the three coal holds, while the floor remained covered with a thick layer of black dust. They also built three kitchens, twenty toilets, two bakeries and a food storeroom for more than 2,000 people. (Originally, there were cabins for 30 people, two toilets, and of course in the food storeroom there was neither light nor heating).

After more than 1,000 illegal immigrants had boarded the Sakaria in mid-sea (The Romanians had promised the British that they would not allow illegal immigrants to board ship at a Romanian port), the ship entered the port of Sulina to take a supply of water. The organizers took advantage of the ship’s anchoring at the port, and took on board most of the illegal immigrants who were waiting in Sulina. This time it fell to Avraham’s lot to be among those fortunate enough to have room found for them on the ship. Avraham’s luck was twofold: On the day he boarded ship a telegram arrived instructing the military police to arrest him. Now, on board ship, Avraham was beyond the reach of the authorities.

A member of the family with whom Avraham stayed in Sulina also wanted to be among those who set sail, but she did not have the necessary financial means. Avraham, who had paid 15,000 Lei to ensure that he would have a place on the ship, bribed a Romanian policeman with 20 Lei (after he was already on board), and the girl was allowed to board ship. However, in Sulina there were still hundreds of Jews who wanted to sail, and right up to the time the ship set sail they tried to board the ship by force. The Turkish captain stopped them from boarding the ship which was carrying passengers to absolutely full capacity. The terrible cries raised by the Jews who were left on the pier as the Sakaria pulled away still rings in Avraham’s ears.

The journey to Israel

The Sakaria left the port of Sulina on February 1st 1940, carrying 2,300 immigrants - the young *Beitar* organizers and rank and file Jews - men, women, children and elderly folk who wanted to escape from the inferno that was already beginning to blaze in Europe.

No sooner had they raised anchor than a great storm rose in the Black Sea. On the first night they already had to stop the engines because of a problem. The conditions were intolerable on the ship into which 2,300 people had been squeezed; with no air and the terrible crowding it was stifling and foul smelling. There were not enough sleeping racks and the immigrants took turns sleeping. The racks, narrow shelves, were close together, 3 and 4 one above the other, with no more than 60 centimeters between each rack and the one above. The sanitary conditions were awful, and the twenty toilets of course did not answer the needs of the passengers. The difficult physical conditions led to squabbling among the immigrants, both among themselves as well as between the different groups among them. As a result, the *Beitar* people, in addition to the problems of the day-to-day running of the ship, were busy calming people down.

The *Sakaria* first called at the port of Zonguldak in Turkey, to load coal which served as fuel to run the ship (At the beginning of 1940, when Europe was already at war, it was impossible to obtain coal in Romania). After two days in the Turkish port the ship sailed for the Straits of Bosphorus. At the entrance to the straits the *Sakaria* had to drop anchor for a whole day because of the heavy fog in the area. They were surrounded by a host of ships which blew their horns incessantly. Off Istanbul (formerly Constantinople) they anchored for only a few hours. The local Jewish community sent gifts of food and commodities to the immigrants (3,000 loaves of bread and 10 oranges for each person). While the ship was lying at anchor they distributed post cards among the passengers so that they could write home.

That same night the ship sailed on but another problem into the engines forced them to stop at the port of Gallipoli in the Dardanelles. The repairs took two days and on their completion, on February 10th, the ship continued the journey, trying to steal her way between the Turkish coast and the small Turkish island Tenedos. There, in Turkish territorial waters they heard a cannon shot. A British warship ordered the *Sakaria* - which was sailing under the Turkish flag - to stop. Four British officers boarded the ship accompanied by 16 armed soldiers.

The Turkish captain began telling the British officer a long and involved story. The Englishman, who did not understand what they wanted, asked: "Where have you been all this time? As long as six weeks ago we received information about your ship from our embassy in Bucharest, and we have been cruising around here ever since, looking for you." He went on to say that there were suspicions that the ship was carrying cargo that might help the enemy, and he remained unconvinced that here were just helpless refugees. In the end he announced that he would have to bring them all to the Admiralty headquarters in Haifa for questioning.

When the immigrants heard that they were heading for Haifa they broke out in cries of joy, and even organized an orchestra to play some English songs in honor of the conquerors of the ship! (who were offended by the reception they got because they were worn out with searching and waiting for the ship carrying the illegal immigrants). Under the escort of 16 of His Majesty's soldiers, the *Sakaria* reached Haifa harbor on the 4th of Adar 5700 (February 13th 1940).

In Israel - in an internment camp

Contrary to their hopes and premature jubilation, the immigrants were not allowed to disembark on the coast; instead they were sent straight to internment camps. For six months they were interned, most of them in Atlit, and the rest in Sarafand. Avraham was interned in Sarafand together with another 400 internees. (Aharon Nachalon, his cousin, who was already a veteran in Israel, sent him aid in the form of money).

This was the biggest illegal immigrant ship to reach Israel so far, and her arrival increased the Jewish population in the country by one half percent. It was not until after the war that larger ships arrived.

Thus Avraham escaped the Holocaust, being almost the sole survivor from his widespread family.

Avraham in the British Army

In 1942 Avraham enlisted in the British army in Israel, and served as a truck driver in Transport Division No. 650. The division served in Egypt and Lybia, and in September 1943 they were sent to Italy (four days after the Allies landed on the shores of Italy). Avraham and his division served in

Italy until the middle of 1946, when the division was disbanded and the men were sent back to Israel.

The search for relatives

In 1945, after the liberation of Europe from the Nazi oppressor, Avraham took “leave” from the army and traveled to Transylvania to look for his family or what was left of it. In his parents’ house in Nasaud he found rack and ruin. A few isolated pictures of his brothers and sisters which were scattered on the floor were the only remaining evidence of his whole family.

This last visit to his parents’ house lasted only a few hours. In Nasaud Avraham found out from survivors that his cousin Kicsi Nussbächer (the daughter of Uncle Moshe, Leibi’s brother) was alive and was staying in the flour mill in the town of Csenger, a distance of 170 km from Nasaud. (At the end of the war Northern Transylvania returned to Romania; Nasaud and Satu Mare are in Romania, whereas Csenger is in Hungary, a few hundred meters from the Romanian border). Avraham found a cart driver who was willing to take him to the border. A few packets of cigarettes were sufficient for the customs officials to allow someone without the appropriate passport to cross the border on foot. A few minutes’ brisk walk took him to his cousin Kicsi, the only one left of her family. We will tell of the contact that was established between the two in another chapter (Chapter 14 - “Kicsi - from Holocaust to Rebirth”).

Chapter 12

The Destruction of Leibi Nussbächer's Family

Avraham Nussbächer's parents, Leibi and Leah, and 9 of his 10 brothers and sisters, perished in the Holocaust. Together with them, their wives, husbands and children, a total of 30, were put to death. Only three members of the family, in addition to Avraham, escaped: his brother, Leizer and his wife, Regina (their two children were murdered); and the son of his sister, Sara, sixteen-year-old Shlomo Ze'ev.

The Bistrita Ghetto

At the beginning of May 1944, Leibi and his family, together with the rest of the Jews of Nasaud and the surrounding area were moved to the Bistrita Ghetto.

The ghetto was set up in an open field, at the side of the Bistrita-Nasaud road, about 5 km from Bistrita, and about 15 km from Nasaud. The confined area in which all the Jews of the region were concentrated, close on 7,000 souls, was enclosed within a triple barbed wire fence. The Hungarian gendarmerie, aided by the local Nazi youth, was put in charge of the ghetto. (Bistrita had a German population from early times; this population befriended the Nazis, and the municipal authority openly passed into their hands when the Germans overpowered Hungary in March 1944).

Apart from a hut that served as a hospital, there was not a single building in the ghetto/prison. The deportees put up makeshift tents with blankets, sheets, raincoats and other items of clothing. The toilets were holes dug in the earth, and had no partitions. From the very first days of their imprisonment in the ghetto, people began to die. The first victims were, as usual, the babies and the elderly. Then young people too began to die, struck down by dysentery and pneumonia. The dead were buried near the ghetto, since the guards did not allow them to be buried in the Jewish cemetery nearby. Here, as in all the ghettos, the Jews were humiliated. Leibi, an elderly Jew, was beaten, and in order to degrade and shame him, or maybe just for their amusement, they cut off half of his beard.

To Auschwitz

The Nazis evacuated the ghetto at the beginning of June 1944. The first transport left on the 1st of June and the second on the 4th. The deportees covered the 3 km that separated the ghetto from the railway station on foot. They were all taken to Auschwitz, where more than 90% died. Not one of the family returned.

Leizer and Regina's two children were also among those that died in Auschwitz. And this is how it came about: Before the war Leizer had lived with his family in a small village called Poiana (Regina's birthplace near Ilva Mica, east of Nasaud). They were the only Jewish family in the village. Leizer earned his living by keeping a small general store and by running an inn. During the war the Hungarian government rounded up all the isolated Jewish families from the villages and put them into a camp near Budapest. Leizer and Regina also had to go there. Before moving to the camp they left their two children, aged 7 and 9, with the children's grandparents in Nasaud, thinking it was safer than the deportees' camp. And as fate would have it, Leizer and Regina survived, and the children and their grandparents - Leibi (his Jewish name was Yitzchak Yehuda the son of Aharon) and Leah - died. Even the children's names were lost and are unknown to us.

Avraham's brother, Ya'akov, aged 31, was also among those deported from the Bistrita Ghetto. This was the order of events: Ya'akov was enlisted for forced labor in the Hungarian army, and was sent to

the front in the Ukraine. There he was seriously wounded in the bombings and was hospitalized. His brother Leizer was also called up (from the deportees' camp) for forced labor, and he too was stationed in the Ukraine. Leizer, who, by virtue of his job as a carpenter, had a pass and so was entitled to travel in the area, found his brother in the hospital and tended him with great devotion. When Ya'akov recuperated from his wounds he escaped across the Russian lines, and through the radio transmissions of the Red Cross announced that he was alive. Later Ya'akov decided to cross the lines once more and returned home to Nasaud. From Nasaud, Ya'akov was taken to his death.

Avraham's three younger sisters, Breindel (Branci), aged 25, Shlimeh, aged 23, and Chaya Genendel (Nendi), aged 21, were sent from Auschwitz to a labor camp. They managed to survive the labor camp, and remained alive until the Russians liberated the camp. Their names appeared in the Red Cross list of survivors, but all traces of them have disappeared. Apparently they died of exhaustion or disease immediately after the liberation, like countless other survivors.

The fate of Leibi's married children

Five of Leibi's six married children perished with their families. After they married, Sara, Ze'ev, Aharon, Blimi and Esther Bracha settled all over Transylvania, and we do not have many details of what happened to them before they were done away with.

Straight after her marriage, Sara, the eldest daughter, went to live in the city Tirgu-Mures. Later she moved with her family to the town of Somcuta Mare (before her brother Avraham came to live there). Sara died in Auschwitz on the 10th of Sivan 5604 (1944), together with four of her five children: Yechezkel, Aharon, Yehudit and another son. Sara's husband, David Farkas, and their eldest son, Shlomo Ze'ev survived the "selection" unharmed. Heaven decreed that at the time of the "selection" Shlomo Ze'ev stood on a stone and so appeared older than his 16 years, and so his life was saved. David and his son were sent from Auschwitz to Warsaw to clear away the debris of the ghetto. From there they were sent to Dachau, and were separated. David Farkas died on the 10th of Tevet 5705 (1944) in Kofering camp, 90 km from Dachau. Shlomo Ze'ev survived.

Ze'ev (Volvi) lived in Nasaud and perished aged 38 together with his wife Rachel.

Aharon, Leibi's third child, lived in Somcuta Mare and continued the timber business which his brother Avraham had established. (When he was called up into the army in 1937, Avraham had to give up the business and Aharon took his place). Aharon was sent to forced labor in the Ukraine, and in 1942, at the age of 34 he perished there. His wife, Chava, died in Auschwitz together with their three children, Asher and another son and daughter.

Blimi lived in Marghita in Bihor County. She died in Auschwitz aged 36 together with her children: Yechezkel, Aharon and another son. Her husband, Moshe Hoffmann, also failed to return from the death camp.

Esther Bracha (Buki) lived in the village of Poiana (between Dej and Baia Mare; not the village of the same name where Leizer lived). She perished aged 33 with her husband, Herschel Zvi, and their two children.

The remnant that escaped

Avraham Nussbächer emigrated to Israel where he set up a wonderful family, whom we will mention later (in Chapter 14 "Kicsi - from Holocaust to Rebirth")

Leizer and his wife, Regina, escaped extermination, but, as we have seen, they paid a heavy price: their son and daughter died in Auschwitz. In 1958, Leizer and Regina made *Aliya* and lived in Petach Tiqva. They died without children; Leizer (Eliezer) died ten years after making *Aliya*, and Regina (her Hebrew name was Sara Rivka) died on the 5th of Iyar 5740 (1980).

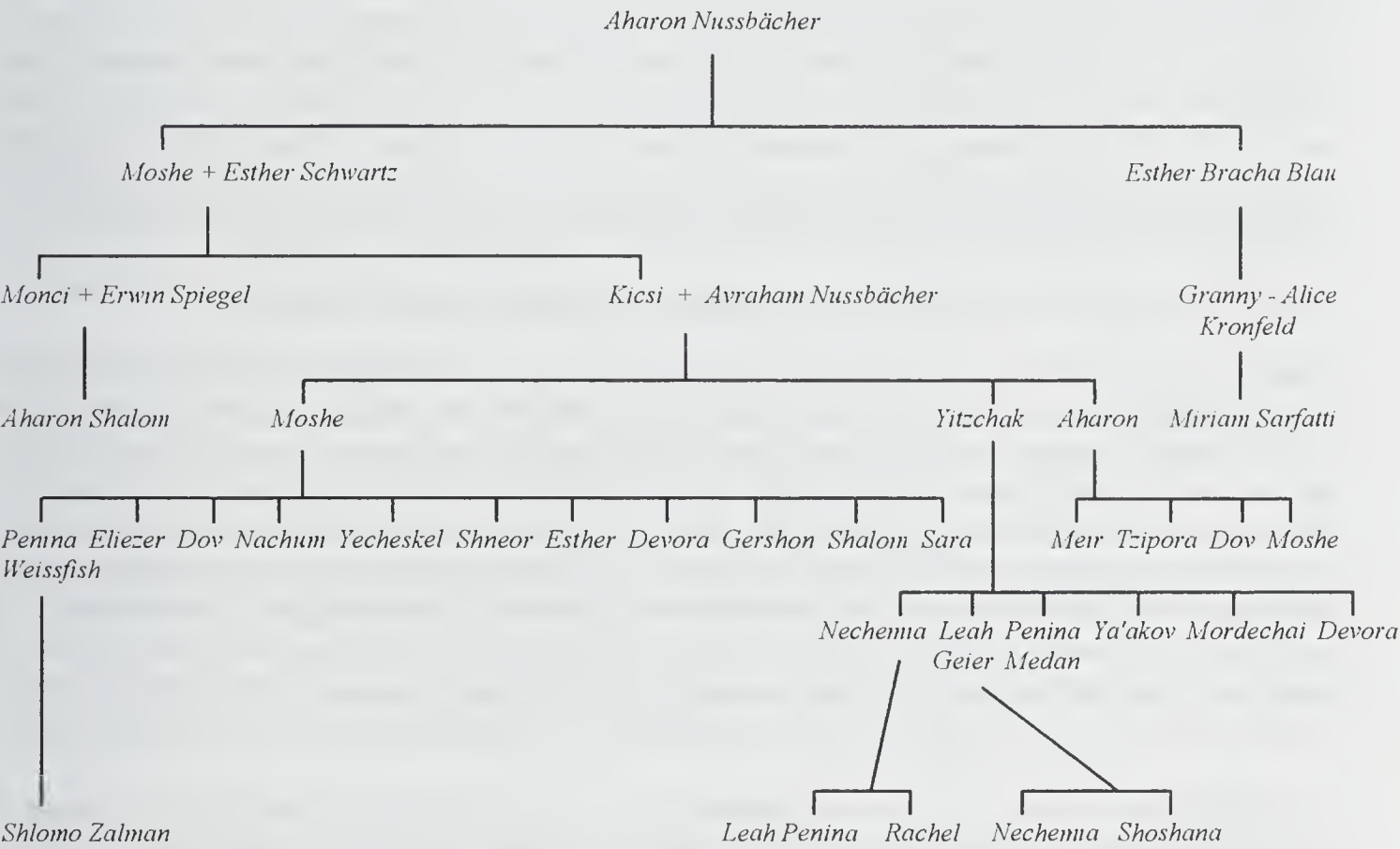
Shlomo Ze'ev Farkas also made *Aliya*, and in the spring of 1952 married Yenta Bluma (in Hebrew, Yehudit) Davidovitch. They had two sons, David and Moshe Mordechai. In 1958 the family left for Australia, and changed their name to Nussbächer, Sara's maiden name. Shlomo Ze'ev died of a heart

attack at the age of 48. His wife, his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren all live in the Diaspora, in Australia and the United States.

Chapter 13

Moshe Nussbächer and his Family

Moshe Nussbächer’s Family Tree



Note: This is only a section of the family tree; for a detailed family tree see p. 147

Moshe Nussbächer

Moshe Nussbächer, Granny’s uncle, was a successful businessman from an early age. Even before his marriage, he managed the large estate of the Hungarian Prime Minister, (Istvan Tisza), near the city of Tirgu-Mures.

Moshe married Esther Schwartz, who was wealthy, and who was also a descendant of the Nussbächer family through her grandmother or great-grandmother. The following story exemplifies the grandmother’s wealth: The story goes that this grandmother received a large herd of cows as a dowry. The herd was so large, that when the cows were transferred from the Nussbächers to the bridegroom’s family (Jungreiss from the town Csenger), it took more than one whole day to cross the river Somesul Mare. After his marriage Moshe settled in the town of Seini, halfway between Satu Mare and Baia Mare. Seini lies at a distance of 7 km from the village of Apa, where his wife Esther was born and brought up. Seini was famed among world Jewry for its printing press where many of the books written by the rabbis of Transylvania were published. In 1941, at the time of the last census before the Holocaust, the Jewish community in Seini numbered more than 700 souls.

Moshe made his living from a flour mill where wheat and maize were ground, and from a factory that produced oil. He also supplied the army with animals for slaughter, and he was a wholesaler for eggs.

Close to the time when his eldest daughter was born, most of his business collapsed, his flour mill was burnt down, and he was deprived of his monopoly for providing the army with animals for slaughter. But he did not lose heart and it is an ill wind that blows no good: he bought the remaining flour mill in the town (from the funds of his wife's dowry, which until that time had been deposited in a bank), and thus he was the sole dealer in flour in Seini. In time Moshe became famous for the high-quality products that he marketed, and he lived a life of ease.

For many years, until his deportation to Auschwitz, Moshe had the honor of being the head of the community in Seini, although he himself used to pray in the small Hassidic Beth Midrash and not in the town's synagogue. It was only on the festivals that Moshe prayed with the entire community in the central synagogue.

The birth of Monci and Kicsi

Moshe was a follower of Reb Haim Zvi Teitelbaum, a brother of the famed Reb Yoelish Teitelbaum. Each year Moshe would travel to the city of Sighetul Marmatiei, to the Rabbi's court, to ask for his blessing that he might have children. One year the Rabbi told him not to approach him again on this subject or to ask for a blessing in this matter. That same year his daughter Miriam, nicknamed Monci, was born. A year later, in 1921, Alte Henna Bluma was born. (She was named after her great-grandmother on the Nussbächer side), and she was nicknamed Kicsi ("the little one" in Hungarian).

Charity - the characteristic quality of Moshe and Esther

Moshe became well-known as a kind-hearted person who did a lot of good. Thus for example, he would pay his workers their wages even when they went on military service or were sick, which was not the accepted practice in an age when social laws were as yet unknown. Moshe connected the *Mikveh*, which was opposite the flour mill, to his private electricity supply, and in this way the *Mikveh* had the benefit of having hot water by the most modern and convenient means. After the flour mill was burnt down and Moshe transferred his business to the flour mill which he had purchased at the other end of the town, he provided the electricity for his neighbor, the doctor's X-ray machine. One Sabbath, when his brother, Kassiel, came to visit him with his family, Moshe showed them with great satisfaction the improvements that he had just completed in the *Talmud Torah* building. Moshe also paid the tuition fees of poor people's children who learned in the *Talmud Torah*.

Moshe had connections with influential Romanians from the time that he lived with his parents in Nasaud. In his parents' house there was a large beautiful garden which stretched along the main road, and the students of the Romanian grammar school in Nasaud used to come there for relaxation. In this way he came to know many of his non-Jewish friends. By virtue of these connections Moshe succeeded on several occasions in nullifying the decrees that were enacted against the Jews in the district. (For instance, he once managed to secure the release of a Jew from prison). His non-Jewish neighbors also benefited from his generosity, and they respected him and showed him their gratitude: at the time of the anti-Jewish riots (in Romania between the two World Wars), the non-Jews in the town protected him from the rioters (who came from far away). This course of action was exceptional, especially considering the fact that at that time the Jews in the surrounding villages were subjected to harassment both by their peasant neighbors and by the authorities, harassment that made them leave their places of residence and their source of livelihood. Even in the Nazi period there were non-Jews who remembered how he had assisted them, and now they helped him.

The Hebrew printing press in Seini attracted rabbis from far and wide. For example, Rabbi Yeshayahu Jungreiss, who came from a famous rabbinic family, and who had several of his books printed in Seini, found a warm welcome in Reb Moshe's house. The Rabbi would come to supervise the printing of his books, which would take several months, and all this time he would stay with the Nussbächers. The Rabbi inscribed a dedication to his hostess, Esther, in one of his books; it was through this dedication that the grandson of the owner of the printing press and Moshe's grandson (Kicsi's son) got to know each other when they were learning in the same Yeshiva in Benci Berak.

After the death of his brother, Kassiel, Moshe helped his widow and her three children as much as he could. Aharon Nachalon found much support, both spiritual and financial, in their house. Moshe spared no pains in helping Aharon, be it in accompanying Aharon for the first time to the new and far

distant Yeshiva, or be it by opening his house to him.

Aunt Esther, too, was a very virtuous woman, with a “heart of gold” - as Aharon well remembers. She would give money to charity anonymously. Grandmother Gitel Nussbächer (the grandmother of Kicsi, Granny and Aharon), would often stay for long periods with her son Moshe where she felt very comfortable. The relations between her and her daughter-in-law were excellent, and Esther treated her mother-in-law with great respect. Thus, for example, when Grandmother came to Seini, she would lengthen the sleeves and hems of her granddaughters’ dresses. (Grandmother Gitel was punctiliously observant, and in her old age used to pray a lot); when Grandmother returned to Nasaud, her daughter-in-law would shorten the clothes again, but she never commented on the fact to her mother-in-law.

Grandmother Gitel died on the 1st of Av 5699 (17.7.1939), at a time when the Romanian army was mobilizing its reserves in preparation for the approaching war. In the turmoil of enrolment, and in the atmosphere of tension and anxiety about what was to come, Moshe traveled to Nasaud for the *Shiv’ah* [the seven day mourning period] for his mother. Esther Nussbächer died in 1941.

Monci

Monci married Erwin Spiegel in 1942. Upon her marriage Monci went to live in her husband’s native town Munkacs in Ruthenia, which, together with the entire region, was at that time annexed by Hungary. Today this is Mukachevo in the Ukraine.

A short while after his marriage, the young bridegroom was enlisted with the rest of the men for forced labor in the Hungarian army. At first Erwin tried to be smart, and in return for a bribe was allowed to do the work the non-Jewish farmers had to do instead of forced labor. At that time the Hungarian authorities used to requisition the farmers’ carts and require them, for a pittance, to take logs of wood from the forests to the river (where the logs were lowered into the water and were carried with the stream to their destination). Erwin bought a cart and two horses and also took part in the transportation of logs. In time the shirkers were discovered and punished. Erwin was sent to forced labor and was prevented from coming home to be with his newly wedded wife. Monci went back to her father’s house in Seini where she bore their son, Aharon Shalom. Erwin did not get the chance to get to know his son or to see his wife again.

Imprisonment

Even before the situation of the Jews in Seini reached the point of no return, a Romanian neighbor suggested that the entire Nussbächer family escape to Southern Transylvania which was in Romanian hands, and that they stay in his daughter’s house. Post factum, as we have explained at length at the beginning of this book, this might have opened a way to salvation. But during the war the Hungarian Jews had their reservations about fleeing to an area under Romanian rule, because in Romania, too, there were German soldiers, and up till the deportation to the ghettos the position of the Jews in Romania was worse than in Hungary. The Hungarian Jews felt that the main thing was to hold out until the storm blew over, and they awaited the Allied attack on the shores of Europe and the early collapse of the Nazis. And indeed, six months after the Germans entered Romania, the area was conquered by the Russian army. However, it was six months too late. The notorious efficiency of the Nazis “proved” itself, and during this short span of time the Germans and their Hungarian helpers managed to clear Northern Transylvania of its Jews - a population of more than 160,000.

Shortly after the Passover of 5704 (1944) two Hungarian policemen, escorted by two of the town’s residents, entered the house of the venerable Moshe Nussbächer and ordered the members of the family to stop whatever they were doing and to come to the synagogue. Under the supervision of the policemen the Nussbächers did as they were told. Within a short time all the Jews of the town and from round about were gathered in the synagogue. Moshe and his daughters, Kicsi and Monci together with the baby Aharon Shalom and their Jewish maid, huddled in one of the corners. They were joined by their uncles and aunts and cousins of the Schwarz family (Esther’s relatives) from the village of Apa; they, too, were accompanied by their long standing Jewish maid, altogether 21 family members.

The Jews were enclosed in the synagogue for several days without food. The extended family was saved from starvation thanks to a Hungarian non-Jew who had in the past been employed by one of the Jewish families, and who now risked his life by bringing them food.

The Satu Mare Ghetto

The Jews were taken from the synagogue to the Satu Mare Ghetto in carts that had been requisitioned from the inhabitants of Seini. On the way Moshe would have had a chance to escape: one of the owners of the carts, remembering the favors that Moshe had done him, suggested concealing him under the cart and so smuggle him out. Moshe was not prepared to desert his daughters, and decided to share the family's fate.

19,000 Jews were concentrated in the Satu Mare Ghetto, and there was great overcrowding. The 21 members of the family were herded into one room. Conditions in the ghetto were very difficult, and there was a great shortage of food. Despite the shortage, the family did not suffer from hunger, because of the good relations, over the years, between Grandmother Schwarz and a highly respected and noble non-Jew. This well-to-do non-Jew, by the name of Nagy, from the village of Apa, remembered his friendship with the grandmother, although she herself had died long before, and he managed to bring two cartloads of food into the ghetto: one for the ghetto clinic and one for the Schwarz family.

The journey to Auschwitz

While Kicsi was in the ghetto, two trains (transports) left for Auschwitz. That same week Kicsi met Avraham (Bumi) Nussbächer, the husband of Buki (the sister of Aharon Nachalon and Surika), who had been enlisted for forced labor. Bumi told Kicsi that he had heard that his wife and their two children (Moshe David and Aharon) as well as his mother-in-law Yettel were in the ghetto, and so he had stolen into the ghetto grounds in order to take them out. But Bumi did not find his loved ones in the crowded ghetto, neither did Kicsi meet them. The two therefore assumed that the group had been deported in the first transport on the 28th of Iyar 5704. After the war Bumi made investigations and found that his family had been annihilated in Auschwitz on the 14th of Sivan, and so had not been deported in the first transport. (Maybe they really were in the ghetto at the time when he was unsuccessfully looking for them).

On the festival of Pentecost 5704 (28.5.1944), Kicsi and her family were deported in the third transport that left the Satu Mare Ghetto for Auschwitz. 70 people were shoved into one coach. The coach was so crowded that all of them had to travel standing up during the three days' journey. During the journey the poor things got nothing to eat. In one corner there were two buckets, one with drinking water and the other for excrements. When the train stopped for a couple of hours, a number of Jews were ordered to fill the bucket with the water and to empty the other one. At Kosice, on the border between Hungary and Slovakia, German soldiers took over from the Hungarian guards.

In spite of the subhuman conditions in the coach, including the terrible crowding, the stuffy atmosphere, the stench and the lack of food, they all reached Auschwitz alive. It was night, and at first sight the railway station in Auschwitz, being all lit up, was very impressive.

Extermination

The family, 21 strong, waited in line for the "selection", the awful singling out by the infamous Dr. Mengele. The six month-old infant Aharon Shalom had been on his aunt Kicsi's arms for most of the journey, and only while waiting for the selection he was handed over into the arms of his mother Monci. In this way Monci was sentenced to death, while Kicsi was granted life. Only three members of the family were directed to the right - to life: 23 year-old Kicsi and two of her cousins - two sisters who were slightly younger than herself. The other 18 members of the family, including Moshe, 24 year-old Monci and her baby, disappeared in the crematoria.

Chapter 14

Kicsi - from Holocaust to Rebirth

Auschwitz concentration camp

Those women who, like Kicsi and her two cousins, survived the selection unharmed, were taken into the Auschwitz concentration death camp: Auschwitz camp no.2. (This camp was also called Birkenau or Auschwitz Birkenau, after the name of the Polish village Brzezinka on which it was erected; the German name was Birkenau). First of all they were all put into a large hall which served as a disinfecting station (sauna), where they were deloused, had showers and had all their hair shaved off. Their shaven heads made the girls so ugly and changed their appearance so much that they did not recognize one another.

After they had taken their showers the girls were given clothes instead of those that they had worn before. Each one got a dress, but quite indiscriminately: a tall girl might get a short dress, a short person would get a long one, heavy girls would get a dress that was too tight, and there were some who were favored with a garment trimmed with lace or an evening gown. They felt that they had been dressed up - but not for *Purim* [a traditionally joyous festival]. Luckily, Kicsi got back her sturdy high leather boots in which she had come to Auschwitz. Later, and all the time they were in Auschwitz, the disinfection procedure was repeated several times each month, and each time there was the same charade of handing out clothes of the wrong size. Once, after being deloused, they waited three days until they were given clothes.

After the delousing, they were put into a transit camp - Camp c (B II c Lager, that is, Camp c in section 2 of Birkenau). Kicsi was put up in Hut no.25, a long hut into which 1,200 women were crowded. The one in charge of the hut (Blockova) was a rabbi's daughter who had lost her mind as a result of the terrible conditions. Her welcoming speech was lengthy and depressing, and full of obscenities and spleen towards the new girls. That was how Kicsi got to know what this place was for, what the purpose of the crematoria was that endlessly belched out smoke, and what end was in store for them. There were no sleeping arrangements in the hut, and the girls slept on the muddy floor, sitting up, one on top of the other. Anyone who chanced to come within range of the girl in charge, would be in for yells and blows for no reason whatsoever.

During the first week Kicsi was too disgusted to even touch the food. In the morning they got something reminiscent of bread, and a kind of coffee that they drank straight from the ladle which was passed from mouth to mouth. With time the girls realized that the bread had been treated with some medicament that prevented menstruation. During the initial period, when the girls were still very fussy, they would exchange the inedible bread for clothes. The exchange was made with prisoners in the adjoining camp which was separated from theirs by high-voltage fencing.

This neighboring camp, Camp b, was different from the other camps in Auschwitz: its inmates were Jewish families from Czechoslovakia, (it was therefore called Tche camp), men, women and children who had not been subjected to the selection procedure; these prisoners wore their own clothes, they did not have their heads shaven. They were undernourished and were just skin and bone. The children's bodies were so deformed that Kicsi took them for dwarfs. The Nazis exploited the inmates of the "family camp" as a bait for further victims: their main task was to remain alive and write "positive" postcards to their relatives in Czechoslovakia, and so refute the rumors about extermination in Auschwitz. After they had been in Auschwitz about six months, and had fulfilled the task assigned to them by the Nazi monsters, Kicsi was witness to their liquidation. On the night of July 10th 1944 a row of trucks drove into Tche camp; in a short while all the 6,000 prisoners were loaded onto the vehicles, one on top of the other, like so many sacks of garbage to be cleared away.

To this day, Kicsi's ears ring with the cries of the miserable creatures and the laughter of the Germans.

Camp c, where Kicsi was kept, was a transit camp - a "reserve" camp. At that time there was a serious labor shortage, and girls from this camp were sent to labor camps and to factories in Germany. Every so often the health service personnel would take blood for the army. Since this was a transit camp, the girls did not have their arms marked with an "identity number". The Germans, so enamored of order and documentation, had no need to report on the fate of the prisoners, which heightened both the prison warders' brutality, and the girls' uncertainty as to their future. If, for example, there was lack of space, whole groups of girls would be sent to the gas chambers.

The days passed with nothing to do and with a terrifying expectancy, that was broken by innumerable roll calls (Appel). At these roll calls the girls were abused in various ways: they had to stand to attention for long hours, by day and by night, sometimes ten times a day. When it was hot, they used to lock the prisoners in their huts, whereas when it rained, even in driving rain, they would take them out into the parade ground. There were also incidents when they were prevented from going to the toilets. Once they brought an orchestra to the parade ground, and Kicsi felt that she was a stooge in a hellish circus.

Sometimes during the roll call, Mengele, the head doctor at Birkenau, would appear in his smart clothes, and use the girls for his macabre amusement. He would pick out ten girls, each time according to different criteria: now blue-eyed ones, now those with a scar on their hands; or just short ones, or tall ones; now those who had not stood quite to attention, another time those who had moved an eyelid. It was all a matter of caprice. The girls who were selected were ostensibly sent to work, but in fact they were on their way to the crematoria.

After about two months in hut no.25 Kicsi met four girls of family Spiegel, inmates of hut no.7, who were related to her brother-in-law Erwin. The girls were assistants to the one in charge of the hut, and they invited Kicsi and the two cousins into their hut. The change of lodging was to their advantage: in hut no.7 there were sleeping racks arranged in two storeys, with five girls to each rack. The bare wooden racks were a significant improvement on the mat on the muddy ground they had got accustomed to in the previous hut.

Thanks to the Spiegel girls Kicsi and her cousins installed themselves on a special rack: a broken rack under which it was possible to hide. When they came to take the girls for work, there was never any knowing whether they were really taking the girls to work, or maybe they were being sent to the crematoria, so the hideout was very valuable. Kicsi and her companions were jealous of those who were sent to work. They thought that whoever worked could, at least sometimes, make off with some food from the garbage or from the parcels of Jews who arrived in the new transports. The woman in charge of the hut, in contrast to her counterpart in hut no.25, did not lose her human qualities, and she helped the girls as much as she could. Admittedly, the endless roll calls continued, the food was of the same quality (or lack of quality) and of the same minimal quantity as in the previous hut, but here at least the girls were spared the crazes and the blows of the other superintendant.

In hut no.7 there was also another relative of ours: Joli - Tilli Nussbächer's wife. In 1948 Tilli and Joli made *Aliya*, after having been interned in Cyprus. They lived in Tel Aviv, and died childless, Joli in 1989, and Tilli in 1991.

The Torgau labor camp

In November 1944, after six months in Auschwitz, there appeared an SS soldier of the rank of *Oberscharführer* (first sergeant, in Kicsi's eyes a senior officer), who was the commander of a labor camp in the city of Torgau, (near Leipzig) in Germany. He arrived in order to pick 250 girls who were to serve as the labor force in a munitions factory near the city. The "officer" filled his quota with girls from hut no.7 including: Kicsi, her two cousins, the four relatives of the Spiegel family and Joli Nussbächer. When the girls reached Torgau camp there were no prisoners there.

The treatment of the girls in Torgau camp was different from that which they had known in Auschwitz. Apparently the camp commander sensed that the defeat of Germany was at hand, and so he demanded that the SS soldiers who were in charge of law and order in the camp, behave humanely. Once when some young SS soldiers struck prisoners, the commander was angry and saw to it that such behavior did not recur. The commander called them “my girls”, and nicknamed himself “their daddy”! That was his way of saving his skin.

Outside the camp, soldiers of the Wehrmacht kept guard - these were older or were wounded - and every now and then they would throw a newspaper over the fence. That was all they could do to help, for at that time, the winter of 1945, the soldiers of the Wehrmacht, too, were suffering from lack of food.

The girls worked in the factory in 12-hour shifts per day; one week a day shift, and one week night shift. Women superintendents of the SS supervised them at work, and they even went to the toilets escorted by the superintendents. The girls were given working clothes, blue shirts and trousers; on the shirtsleeve a ribbon was attached with the work *Haftling* [prisoner] and their identity numbers. The idea was to create the impression that the girls had been found guilty of crimes, and for reasons of expedience they were serving their sentences in a factory instead of a prison. The Wehrmacht soldiers did not believe that the girls were innocent, and that their sole crime was the fact that they were Jewish.

Typhoid fever

There was a great distance between the camp and the factory, and the girls had to cover it on foot day in, day out. The work, in long shifts was also hard, especially in the undernourished condition the girls were in. One day on the way back from work, Kicsi collapsed at the entrance to the camp and was taken unconscious to the sick bay. In a short while there were four more patients including one of the cousins. It turned out that the five girls had caught typhoid fever - a serious, contagious disease, which causes high temperature, headache and diarrhea. In order to prevent the spread of the disease, the camp was put in quarantine and the prisoners were not sent to work.

The treatment of typhoid fever was beyond the competence of the Jewish doctor in the camp. An old doctor of the Wehrmacht was called, and he gave orders to remove them from the camp. The five patients were taken from the sick bay by ambulance in view of their weeping friends who assumed, despite the doctor’s reassuring words, that they were being taken to be killed. The ambulance took them to a military hospital where they were kept in isolation under the supervision of a nurse round the clock. Kicsi was hit worst of all, and during the first period she just lay unconscious. She was delirious and in her delirium she kept asking her father to bring her an apple. Even during the bombings, when all the patients went down into the shelters, Kicsi remained in her bed.

After several weeks of hospitalization, and due to the devoted care of the nurse who was with them, the girls were sent back to the camp. Kicsi’s four comrades went back to work, while Kicsi, who was still extremely weak (she was incapable of taking in solid food), was put into the camp sick bay. One day the camp commander appeared in the sick bay, gave Kicsi a lump of sugar, and told her in a fatherly way that she would not have to go back to work in the factory.

When Kicsi had got a little stronger, the commander kept his promise and arranged for Kicsi to do lighter work: cleaning the floor in the Wehrmacht soldiers’ quarters. The Wehrmacht woman soldier who was entrusted to guard Kicsi during her work, was not over-particular and did not ask her to work beyond her limited strength. Sometimes she would give Kicsi a slice of dry bread - an important addition to the meager daily ration. The soldier woman told her that before Kicsi’s group had arrived from Auschwitz, a group of 250 French women had worked there. These women had suffered harsh treatment at the hands of the camp commander and the SS soldiers, and in the end they had been sent away to be liquidated. According to the soldier girl, Kicsi and her comrades had been treated “humanely” only because of the timing, and the commander’s perspicacious realization of what was to come.

Liberation is at hand

In April 1945 the girls felt that their personal hell was progressively coming to an end: the bombings by the Allies became more and more frequent; then the Wehrmacht soldiers guarding the camp disappeared and after a short time the SS soldiers also fled. The 250 girls remained alone with the commander. The store of food ran out and no new supplies arrived. The camp commander, accompanied by some of the girls, went to look for food, and in so doing broke into some warehouses and shops. He updated the girls about the Russian advance, reminding them of how he had cared for their comfort during their stay in the camp.

Here come the Americans!

At last the liberators arrived. It was in April 1945 that the American soldiers appeared at the gates of the camp. They were Jewish soldiers stationed in Leipzig who had heard of the camp and came to save the girls. The soldiers distributed food and lots of clothing among the girls, and gave each one of them a gift: a watch and a pendant in the form of a *Mezuza* [a parchment scroll bearing verses from the scriptures]. The girls even got an accordion. The Jewish chaplain who accompanied the soldiers told the girls about the Holocaust that had overtaken the Jewish people; he explained to them that they would find their homes desolate and suggested that they start a new life in Israel.

Several days later the Russians occupied the area. (Torgau is famous as the place where on April 25th 1945 the Russian and American forces met). Before the American soldiers returned to Leipzig they promised the girls that if they did not want to remain under the auspices of the Russians they could come to them and receive American protection; this protection would be given only to those girls from the camp for whom the *Mezuza* that each had received would be a “ticket of admission”.

As soon as the Russians came they robbed the girls of all that the Americans had given them, including the accordion. But the Russians also wanted the girls. Luckily one of the girls, who came from Munkacs in Ruthenia (now Mukachevo in the Ukraine) could speak Russian, and having the gift of the gab, she succeeded in repulsing them. So on the day of their arrival the Russians made do with the American booty!

That same night all the 250 girls fled. They covered the 36 km to Leipzig on foot. As promised, they were allowed to enter the American army camp, where they remained for about a month. The American army made an orderly list of all the girls and organized their return to Romania.

Back to Transylvania - where to return to?

The return journey began by bus. In order to protect the girls from the Russian soldiers, they were escorted by Jewish young men who had themselves been liberated by the Americans. The group's first night stop was in Czechoslovakia. After a long wait the group continued their journey in a special train assigned to Jewish survivors returning home. The journey was interrupted several times and went on for weeks. On the way, Jews who had already returned home gave them food and milk. At last the train reached Budapest and from there continued straight home - to Transylvania. In July 1945 the train reached Odoreu, near Satu Mare. The returnees were welcomed by one of the cousins' brothers, who had come back from forced labor. The brother tried to talk Kicsi into staying with them, but she preferred to return home. Kicsi took leave of her two cousins with whom she had trodden the same path ever since they had been herded into the synagogue in Seini more than a year earlier, and continued on her way.

At the village of Apa, Kicsi got off the train carrying the survivors, and accepted the invitation of a couple of relatives to stay in the village. The couple, a cousin - one of the Schwarzes - and her husband, persuaded her that there was no point in traveling to Seini since her parents' house had been plundered and stood empty. In the past, the village of Apa had been a place of happiness and joy to Kicsi and her cousins. For the festivals, the grandmother's seven children together with their large families, would gather in the Schwarz home, and the whole great gathering of uncles, aunts and cousins would celebrate together. For the Passover and the festival of Tabernacles, each family would come with their maid, their nursemaid, and even their cow. On *Purim* the horse would come into the house and trot around to the great delight of the children. Kicsi would join in the pranks played by the

children of the cousins and the peasants. All that remained of the magical past was memories. Kicsi now found refuge in a place devoid of all joy of living, now that most of Grandmother's descendants had perished in the war.

The return of the family property

Before the family was taken to the ghetto they deposited their valuables with their non-Jewish neighbors in the hope of getting them back "after the war". Now Kicsi approached the neighbors and asked for the return of the property. Usually the non-Jews gave back what had been deposited. Except for a diamond ring, Kicsi got back all the family jewels; clothes and even perfume were returned to her. Silverware that had been placed with the noble Nagy (their benefactor from the Satu Mare Ghetto) were given back. A Romanian neighbor who lived opposite them, came to Kicsi of his own accord and gave her back a gold watch that had belonged to her father, although she had no knowledge whatsoever that it had been deposited with him. (This was the same neighbor, called Sasaran, who still before the deportation to the ghetto, had suggested that the Nussbächers flee to Romania and stay with his daughter).

During the war, when the Jews were forbidden to run any business dealing in food, her father, Moshe Nussbächer, had "transferred" his business concerns to two non-Jews. Other Jews had dealt with their business in the same manner. The non-Jew who had "received" the flour mill from Moshe was always drunk and had dissipated all the profits on liquor. On the other hand, the non-Jew who had held the other property, took good care of the profits that accrued in the course of the year during which the Jews "disappeared", and he now gave Kicsi a handsome sum of money. The establishment acted with wanton cynicism: Kicsi was required to pay rates on the family property even for the period during which they were deported from the area, and this despite the fact that the house was pillaged and its entire contents looted. (Nothing was left for Kicsi - not even a picture of her parents).

The town of Csenger

The couple, relatives of Kicsi in the village of Apa with whom she stayed, decided to return to their normal routine. Before the war they had worked a flour mill in the town of Csenger in Hungary, and now they planned to cross the border and return there. Kicsi accepted their invitation to cross over to Csenger with them.

The three of them began walking in the direction of the border between Hungary and Romania. On their solitary journey they noticed a Russian soldier coming towards them. The women in the group immediately concealed the jewelry they were wearing and with fear in their hearts, as always in the vicinity of Russian soldiers, went on walking. Suddenly Kicsi recognized, under the Russian officer's uniform, her brother-in-law, Erwin Spiegel: Erwin had heard of the train carrying the survivors that had reached the village of Apa, and although he had already heard that his wife and son had perished, he was on his way to the village in the hope of finding them among the survivors. Erwin himself had already been released from forced labor and had managed to get himself a creditable post in the Soviet army: municipal officer of Mukacevo.

A nocturnal meeting

At the beginning of November 1945, one Thursday night, shortly after the three had reached their destination, a visitor suddenly appeared at the flour mill in Csenger: Avraham Nussbächer - Kicsi's (and Granny's) cousin. It will be remembered that in 1939 Avraham had made *Aliya*; in 1942 he joined the British army, which brought him to Italy. At the end of the war Avraham took "leave" from the army and went to look for his family in Transylvania. There he got on Kicsi's trail and now he caught up with her. Two days later, at the end of the Sabbath, the two decided to get married; but the very next day Avraham hurried back to his unit so that he would not be considered a deserter.

In order to put their plans into action Kicsi had first of all to join Avraham who was stationed with the British army in Italy. With the help of bribes and connections she succeeded in getting a Romanian passport. In December Kicsi traveled to Budapest in the hope of getting an entrance permit to Italy. However, diplomatic relations between the two countries had not yet been restored so there were no consuls there who could supply her with the much-desired permit.

Kicsi tried another way: joining *Hachshara*. In Hungary, as throughout Europe, the Zionist movements re-established the *Hachshara* groups in preparation for *Aliya*. These organized groups left Hungary for Israel in all manner of ways, not necessarily legal. At the organizational center in Budapest Kicsi met one of the active members, Jekuthiel Klein - one of the sons of Rabbi Klein of Cehul Silvaniei. Jekuthiel, who as a native of Cehul Silvaniei knew the Nussbächers well, helped Kicsi, and that same week she was included in a *Hachshara* group that set out by train for Vienna.

The journey to Italy

The journey to Italy passed off without any special problems. At the Austro-Hungarian border the members of the *Hachshara* group presented Polish papers that they had received from active members of the “*Bericha*” [escape] organization. (an underground organization that was active in transferring more than 200,000 Jews from Central and Eastern Europe to the coast from where they made *Aliya* - usually illegally. The organization was active from 1944 - 1948). In Vienna the members of the group were put up in a building which in the past had served as a Jewish hospital, (Rothschild Spital), the donation, many years earlier, of the Rothschild family. Now the place became a refugee camp to which, for a length of time, there streamed tens of thousands of Jews from all over the Soviet Union, Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and from there via the *Bericha* organization.

After the war Austria was divided into four occupation zones: British, American, Russian and French. Although Vienna was in the Russian occupied zone, the city was divided into four occupation zones, and the “Rothschild Spital” camp was in the American zone. A special permit was needed in order to pass from one occupation zone to another. In those places where the “*Bericha*” members did not succeed in “winning over” the guards, and so did not get the necessary transit permits, they transferred the refugees by means of “home made” permits.

After a week the group went on to the Austrian city of Salzburg, close to the German border, in the American occupied zone. There they were accommodated in a school and waited to continue their journey. From Salzburg most of the refugee groups were sent to Germany where they were placed in transit camps waiting for the gates of Israel to open. Most of the young people of the pioneer *Hachshara* groups went from Salzburg to Italy, and with the aid of the “Institute for Aliya B” they entered Israel illegally. Kicsi joined one of the groups that was sent to Italy.

While Kicsi was awaiting her group’s turn to cross into Italy, the Italian border was closed to them. This happened after a number of Jewish smugglers, insinuating themselves among the refugees, were caught, and the authorities could no longer turn a blind eye to the infiltrators. In January the “*Bericha*” organizers succeeded in transferring a number of groups via a new passage, until heavy snow and a shooting incident at the end of the month put an end to further attempts to cross the border. Subsequent groups that reached Salzburg likewise had to wait because of unforeseen obstacles.

Kicsi sought, unsuccessfully, a way of crossing into Italy by means other than via the “*Bericha*” organization. First she tried to get an official visa to Italy on her Romanian passport. When this attempt failed, she contacted one of the smugglers who transferred refugees for money, to help her cross the border. Unfortunately this Jewish smuggler took too much of a fancy to her, and he agreed to help her only on condition that she marry him. The result was that Kicsi was forced to go on waiting with her group in Austria until the “*Bericha*” organization found a way to help them.

In March, when the snows melted, the crossings to Italy began again. Kicsi asked people whose turn to travel had arrived, to let Avraham know that she was held up in Austria. (The postal services between the two countries had not yet been restarted). Of all the messengers only one youth (the only one who had not received cigarettes, chocolate or money from her) passed on her note to the addressee. This happened just in time, because Avraham was planning to travel to Transylvania again to look for her.

Kicsi’s group and many others were directed to the city of Innsbruck in Western Austria, in the French occupation zone, which was the meeting point before the crossing into Italy. In this city Kicsi celebrated *Purim* 5706 (1946). Shortly before the Passover her group at long last received permission

to set out. They crossed the border in a truck at a small border point in the town on Nauders, 130 km from Innsbruck. Like all the other 2,000 Jews who crossed into Italy that winter with the help of the “*Bericha*” organization, they, too, were provided with forged documents and were accompanied by “*Bericha*” organization members pretending to be British soldiers. In Italy Kicsi left the group and, with an acquaintance from Budapest, continued her journey on a cart up to the British army camp near Naples, where the Israeli soldiers were stationed.

Marriage

Kicsi lodged in a rented room in a suburb of Naples. From the moment that she arrived, Avraham and Kicsi tried to marry, a mission which they realized was by no means easy. The military authorities made difficulties and did not want to conduct the (civil) wedding, for fear of incest: the two had the same surname and declared that they were cousins. In the end, at the beginning of June 1946, Avraham’s commander agreed to marry them. Following the wedding, as the wife of a soldier in His Majesty’s army, Kicsi was entitled to an entry permit to Israel (the famous “certificate”).

However, Avraham and Kicsi wanted to marry in accordance with Jewish law and they did not make do with a formal marriage forced on them by the circumstances prevailing at the time. It first they were precluded from doing so because this was the time between Passover and Pentecost [when weddings are not allowed]. After Pentecost they traveled to Rome, but the American Jewish chaplain refused to marry them and would only give them a letter of recommendation. The Chief Rabbi of Italy, Rabbi Prato, too, was not overjoyed to marry them because they had no witnesses who could testify to the fact that they were single or what was the family relation between them. Finally, their determination bore fruit, and one Friday, when they again appeared before the Italian Rabbi, the latter relented and agreed to marry them on the spot. Kicsi went into the street, bought a head scarf, immersed herself in a *Mikve* (which was in the same building), and in the afternoon, in the presence of ten Jews who worked in the community building, Avraham and Kicsi were married.

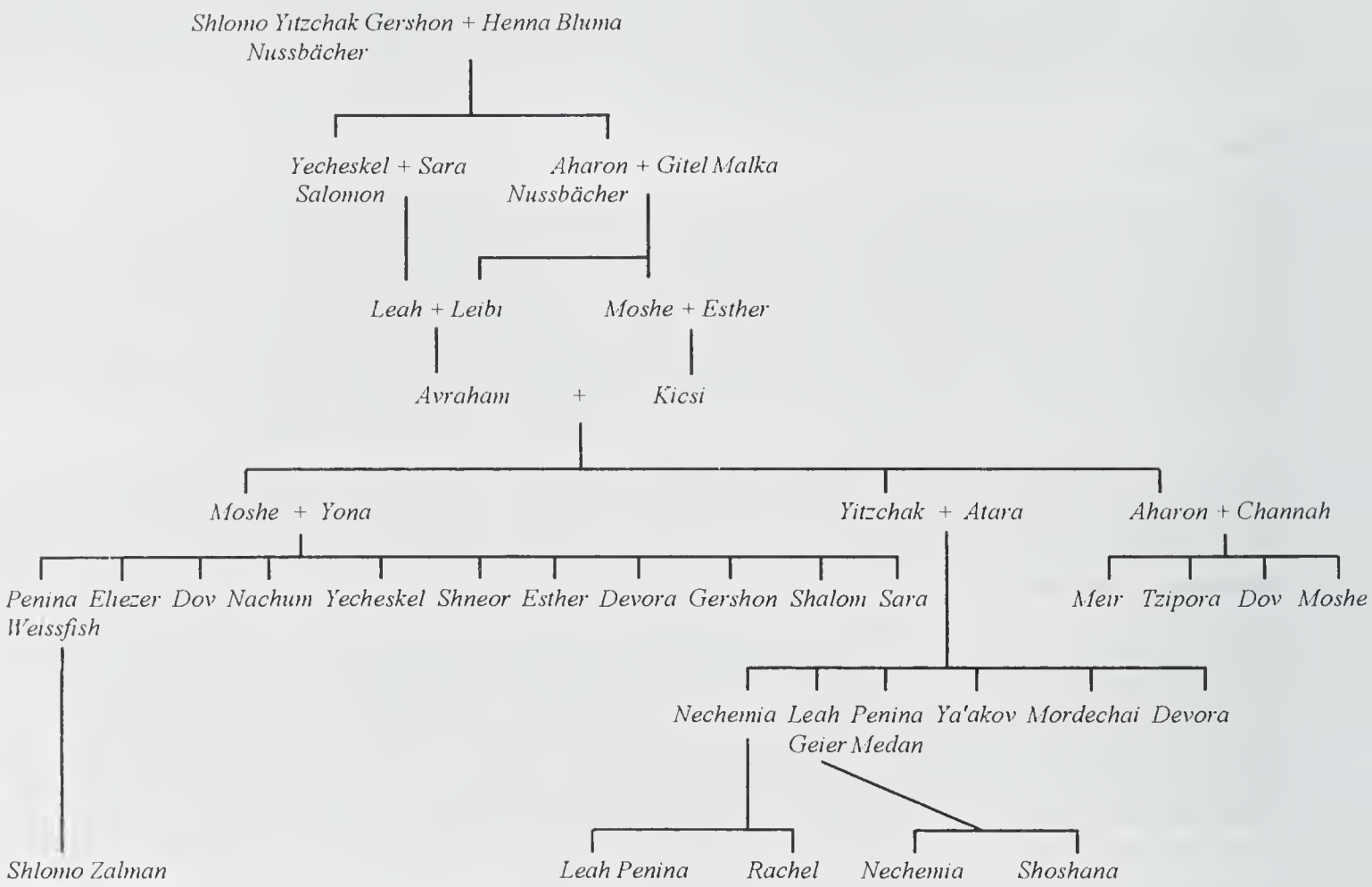
On the way to Israel

Shortly after the wedding Avraham returned to Israel with the last of the soldiers. Kicsi had to stay in Naples for another month, waiting for the certificate. A group of 20-30 women waited with her, including Italian women who were all married to Israeli soldiers. Since every woman who married a soldier was given a certificate without any problems, there were many fictitious weddings so as to allow as many women as possible to make *Aliya*; on arrival in Israel, these couples divorced.

At the end of August 1946 the group received the long awaited certificates and arrived in Alexandria in Egypt on a British ship. Israeli soldiers gave them an impressive welcome. On this same occasion a circle was closed: the porters on the harbor were German prisoners. After a week of excursions in Egypt as guests of the British army, the group of women got on a train that took them to Israel. They arrived in Tel Aviv on the Sabbath and Kicsi found a truck owner who drove her to Petach Tiqva. She arrived just as the worshippers were leaving the synagogue; one of them took her case into his house and accompanied her to Avraham’s house in the Nachalat Zvi quarter.

In Petach Tiqva Kicsi and Avraham began their new life. They had three sons, and a lot of grandchildren, and their first great-grandson has already been born. Of their native land only memories remain.

Avraham and Kicsi Nussbächer's Family



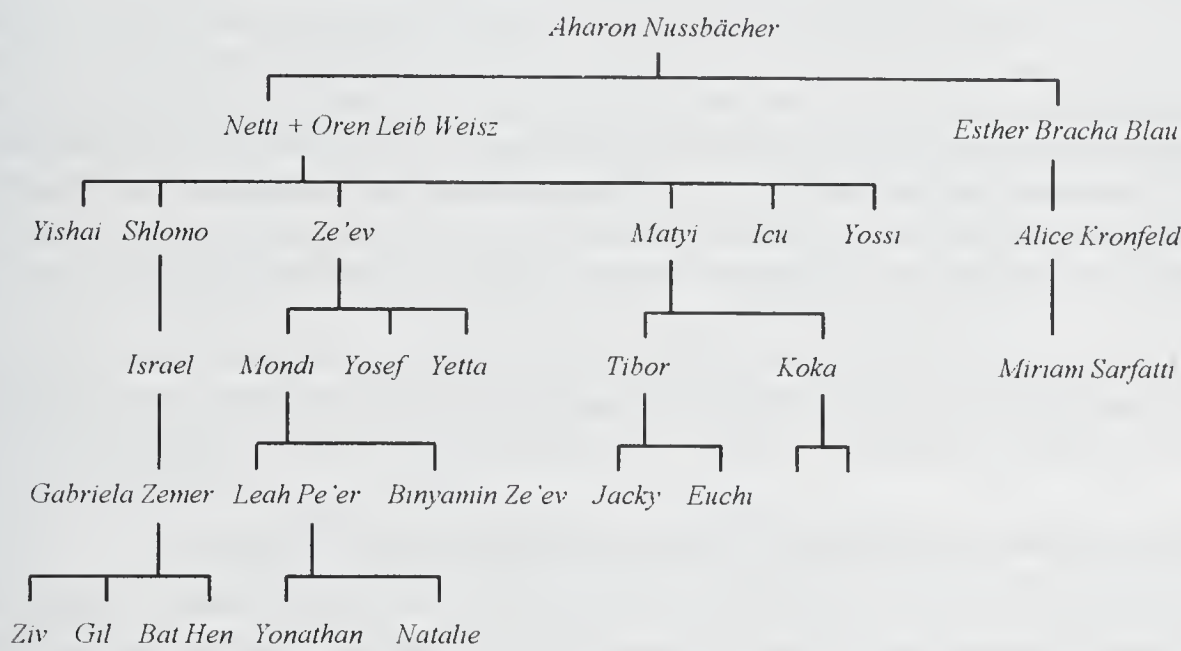
Note: This is only a partial family tree; for a detailed family tree see p. 147 and p. 149

Chapter 15

Aunt Netti and the branch of the Weisz Family

Netti Weisz’s family tree

Aunt Netti - her Hebrew name was Chaya Genendel daughter of Aharon Nussbächer - was the eldest sister of my grandmother Esther Bracha. Aunt Netti married Reb Oren (Arnold) Leib Weisz.



Note: This is only a partial family tree; for a detailed family tree see p. 144

Netti and Oren Leib Weisz

Aunt Netti was very beautiful and by virtue of her beauty she got engaged to Oren Leib. And this is how it came about: the young Yeshiva boy, Reb Oren Leib was invited to Nasaud to meet a girl who had been suggested as a match for him. This young girl was a relation and also a good friend of Netti’s. According to the practice that a young couple intending to marry do not spend the night under the same roof, it was decided that Reb Oren should stay in the house of Aharon Nussbächer, Netti’s father. When Oren saw Netti he would not agree to meet the girl “intended” for him; he wanted only Netti. It was not a pleasant situation but Oren insisted and in the end he married Aunt Netti. (Aunt Netti was conscience stricken for many years, because her friend made an unfavorable match and mental problems also arose).

Oren Leib and Aunt Netti settled in the city of Simleul Silvaniei. Oren Leib traded in timber and in cement and its products; the large courtyard behind his house served for storage and trading. The farmers in the surrounding area for whom there was no work in the fields in the winter, would cut down the trees in the forests and take the logs to the many sawmills in the district. On Thursdays the farmers would come to Oren Leib’s courtyard and sell him the logs which were used for building. 20 to 30 cartloads would arrive that day in the courtyard and there was a great tumult. In another part of the courtyard business was carried on with cement and cement pipes for sewage and bridges.

Reb Oren Leib’s standing in the Simleul Silvaniei community which numbered 1,500 Jews (about a fifth of the total population) was highly respected, and he even attained the position of vice-president

of the congregation. He was of a happy disposition and some of his sayings are remembered to this day. Thus, for example, he used to say that the goose had been miscreated, being too much for one person and too small for two.

Aunt Netti was very particular in keeping the commandments, so much so that people would jokingly say that she must surely wear ritual fringes [worn only by men]. Aunt Netti did good deeds in secret and helped whoever was in need, as she had been taught in her father's house. In her conduct Aunt Netti was a model and set an example to her children and grandchildren.

This is how her grandson Israel describes the Weisz household and the atmosphere on Passover eve:

The house next to the iron bridge over the River Crasna with its roof covered in red tiles, its windows overlooking the water, the ornate tower, awaits an answer from the reflection of the water: Is it sufficiently splendid? The garden was all perfume of pines For us, the children, the main attraction was the garden, with its blackcurrant bushes, its jujube and apple trees. Who can count the number of times I climbed the magnificent walnut tree....

On the eve of Passover there is no organized meal. Cooking pots full of potatoes and hard-boiled eggs are bubbling on the stove which has already been decked out in its Passover covering. From these, the members of the family nonchalantly take their pick. Grandmother [Netti] bustles around with boundless energy between the stacks of kitchen utensils which have not yet been put in place, directing those doing the work, my mother and the maid. Nor are the men exempt from work. A pleasant tension pervades everything. One can clearly sense the approach of the festive atmosphere of the *Seder* night, one can feel it physically....

Oren Leib died at the age of 65 (before World War II), and was buried in the cemetery in Simleul Silvaniei. Aunt Netti was deported to the Simleul Silvaniei Ghetto in May 1944 together with the other Jews of the city. A month later she was murdered in Auschwitz at the age of 70.

The descendants of Aunt Netti and Oren Leib Weisz

Six sons were born to Aunt Netti and Oren Leib: Yishai, Shlomo, Ze'ev, Matyi, Icu and another son who was born in their old age, Yossi. The boys learnt in Yeshivot. Thus for example, Shlomo and Ze'ev learnt in Rabbi Eliezer David Gruenwald's Yeshiva in Schlaining - one of the "Seven communities" in Burgenland. When Rabbi Gruenwald was elected (in 5672 - 1912) to officiate in the Rabbinate in the city of Viseul de Sus in Maramaros County, Shlomo and Ze'ev went to learn there. (Aharon Nachalon was also privileged to learn at the feet of Rabbi Gruenwald when the latter was in the Rabbinate in Satu Mare).

The sons of Aunt Netti and Oren Leib were learned but they also were men of the world; there were few such families in Transylvania. They were businessmen as their outward appearance testified. Their dress was European and they wore modern hats (with a fold in the middle, nicknamed in those days "the splitting of the Red Sea", in contrast to the round hats worn by the Hassidim).

Yishai, the eldest son, died at the age of 13. Icu (Yitzchak - Istvan) emigrated to South Africa in 1931 and lived there for the rest of his life. He died, childless at nearly 100 years old.

Their son, Yossi (Jozsef - Julius), was called up for forced labor in 1942. He returned to Simleul Silvaniei after the war and reopened the timber business. He married Barbara (Biri) Lindenfeld. At that same time he very charitably took into his house his cousin - Nendi Blau together with her infant son Kutti, as I have already related in another chapter. In 1946 the Communist regime nationalized the business and requisitioned the house he had inherited from his parents. Yossi and Biri moved to the city of Tirgu-Mures and shortly afterwards got divorced. Yossi made *Aliya* in the early sixties, lived in Ramat Gan and remarried. In 1994 Yossi died. Biri also made *Aliya* and settled in Jerusalem.

I will have more to say about Shlomo, Ze'ev and Matyi in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 16

Israel Weisz is called up for forced labor

Shlomo and Golda Weisz

Shlomo, Aunt Netti and Oren Leib Weisz's elder son (after the firstborn, Yishai, died young), married Golda (Gizi) Stern, who came from the big city Oradea (Grosswardein in German and so called by the Jews). Shlomo and Golda lived in the city of Baia Mare where their son Israel was born. Afterwards the family moved to Simleul Silvaniei, where Shlomo's parents lived.

Shlomo and Golda died in the Holocaust. Golda was deported together with her mother-in-law to the Simleul Silvaniei Ghetto, and was murdered in Auschwitz in June 1944, aged 50. Shlomo was enlisted long before to forced labor, never to return. Although a friend who survived was a witness to Shlomo's murder, the time and place of his death are not known. Israel, Shlomo and Golda's only son, was also taken for forced labor in 1941. This is perhaps the place to enlarge in detail what exactly lay behind the concept "forced labor" in the "labor service companies".

Forced labor in the "Labor service companies", in the service of the Hungarian army

The semi-military Labor service system operated by Hungary during World War II, was unique. In none of the Axis countries was there such a comprehensive and varied system as in Hungary. This system encompassed tens of thousands of men of military age, who were classified as "unreliable" and were therefore considered unfit to bear arms; instead, these men were enrolled in the "labor service companies" as auxiliary forces for the army.

Those in the "service companies" were employed in various kinds of forced labor, which were of benefit first and foremost to the army. They were employed mainly in road construction, digging quarries, laying down railroad tracks, clearing forests, building and maintaining fortifications for the army in Hungary and the territories captured by the Hungarians and the Germans in the Ukraine and in Yugoslavia. Along the front, especially in Galicia and the Ukraine, they were employed in the maintenance of the roads, clearing snow, loading and unloading munitions and other products, propelling supply trains (which were drawn by horsepower - and sometimes they replaced the horses) and clearing fields of landmines (which on occasion meant walking through them).

Those doing forced labor served in their units, under the command and supervision of Hungarian officers and guards. They were called muszos, an abbreviation for the Hungarian name for these units - munkaszolgálatos. Although at first the intention was that the system should include all the "unreliable elements", including the Romanians, the Serbs, the Slovaks and the Communists, in effect the system served chiefly as a means of "solving the Jewish problem". The Jews of Hungary were declared as unfaithful to the state; therefore, already in 1940 Jewish youths were no longer enlisted into the army, but were forced into the labor companies.

In March 1942, just before the second Hungarian army was sent to the Eastern front (to support Germany), an order was given regarding the "the employment of Jews for the demands of war". Following this order, thousands of Jewish adults (up to the age of 49) were enrolled into the work companies between the years 1942 - 1943. These were mostly heads of families who in many cases were left without a breadwinner. The majority of those enlisted were sent to the Ukraine.

The forced labor servicemen who were sent to the Ukraine were finally put to death with the most indescribable cruelty. Their guards killed them as a matter of routine; the hard labor, the inhuman conditions, starvation, disease and the cold, all these took their toll on the miserable creatures. The words of Lieutenant-Colonel Muray, quoted in the Budapest court that tried him for his crimes, reflect the attitude to the Jewish forced laborers in the Ukraine: "A good commander is one who brings back only a few Jews". The then Hungarian Minister of defense writes in his memoirs: "The servicemen who were brought to the Ukraine carried their own death warrants in their packs." In his defense statement written before he was executed for war crimes, General

Ferenc Szombathelyi, the former Chief of Staff, summed up the treatment of the forced laborers in these words:

Cruelty became love for the fatherland, atrocities became acts of heroism, corruption was transformed into virtue... There emerged two types of discipline. One was applied to the Jews against whom any action was permissible...

The situation of the forced laborers who remained in Hungary was immeasurably better. They were quartered in barracks or warehouses, and their living conditions were more or less reasonable. They were in touch with their families and were given furlough to visit their homes. The Jews of the cities and towns where they were encamped worked to improve their condition and hosted them generously. If out of the forced laborers sent to the Ukraine about 90% were murdered, of those servicemen who remained in Hungary, the greater majority returned.

Israel was supposed to enlist for military service in 1940, when he was 21, but he was lucky: he succeeded in deferring his enlistment for a year. His comrades, who were called up at the end of 1940, were the first to be enrolled in the labor service battalions instead of the regular army units. They were sent to the Ukraine, to the Russian front, and only a handful returned.

Israel Weisz's forced labor service in Transylvania

Israel who, as mentioned, was called up in 1941, was stationed in the city of Baia Mare in a barracks which served as a call-up center and headquarters of the tenth service battalion to which he belonged. The servicemen who were stationed there served as a labor force reserve for all the forced labor in the region. They were employed in the construction of railway lines and roads, deforestation and laying telephone lines. Israel's work was generally to repair and maintain railway lines. So long as Israel was in Baia Mare his life was bearable. The battalion commander, Colonel Imre Reviczky, saw to it that the servicemen were decently treated. (Under the rule of the Nazi occupation this commander saved thousands of Jewish forced laborers from death, and he is considered one of the Righteous Gentiles).

Once in midwinter, in the middle of January, Israel was included in a group that was sent to the area around the village of Cosna, about 150 km east of Baia Mare. The group was taken to a thick forest of oak trees that extended over a very steep slope. The trees were felled and then sawn down into planks to be used as crossbars on the railway. In the snow and the frost of the high mountain (1,700 m.), Israel had to do heavy carrying - an almost inhuman task: together with another Jew he had to take the heavy oak beams down to the path leading up to the slope. With each "turn" Israel and his partner were forced to take down two heavy beams. Each time they slipped and fell on the steep snow-covered slope, Israel thought his end had come. After six days Israel was sent back to Baia Mare, and he left the forest feeling he had escaped death.

The transfer to Hungary

At one of the daily roll calls, as had happened many times previously, one of the camp officers appeared, looking for workers experienced in building. Any simpleton who responded to such a request, would usually find himself performing degrading forced labor, such as cleaning the toilets. For this reason Israel avoided volunteering his services when they were looking for a carpenter, although in Simleul Silvaniei he had learnt carpentry for a year and a half. This time, on an inexplicable impulse, he did volunteer.

A group of 40-50 "building experts" was formed and sent to Hungary to the Tapiosuly labor camp, about 40 km from Budapest. In this camp the Jewish servicemen built large warehouses for the needs of the army, offices and living quarters for the camp commander. The entire construction, from start to finish, including the furniture, was assigned to the Jews. Here, they too had to carry loads, but not under the inhuman conditions that prevailed in the forest of Cosna.

The working conditions in Tapiosuly were tolerable, but the behavior of the commanders and the guards was extremely brutal. They frequently tortured the Jews, until the relatives of some of the servicemen, who were influential in the appropriate quarters in Budapest, succeeded in replacing the camp staff. True, the camp commander (Major) and the sadistic officers were not punished, but merely pensioned off, yet this too was a considerable achievement in the anti-Semitic atmosphere of those days.

In the hands of the Germans

In the fall of 1944, as the Soviet forces that freed Hungary came progressively closer to Budapest, the laborers were evacuated from the Tapiosuly forced labor camp. They marched about 200 km on foot up to the Austrian border where they were handed over to the Germans.

The methods of torture changed: from sadism for the sake of sadism to hard labor, starvation and the murder of prisoners. The Jewish forced laborers were taken to the loft of a large granary in the Austrian village Strem, near the Hungarian border, where they were ordered to dig anti-tank ditches. Once a number of Jews were caught in one of the ditches taking a rest from their exhausting work; they were shot on the spot. The defense line was of no use whatsoever since it did not deter the advance of the victorious Soviet forces.

The death march

The Soviets continued their advance, and after about three weeks in Strem the workers were evacuated from there as well. Israel and his comrades were attached to a large group of prisoners that was being evacuated for the same reason. Now they began a death march of about 250 km: across Austria - via the Austrian Alps - to Mauthausen concentration camp. Starved, the Jews marched in the snow and in the stormy weather of the winter of 1945, for days and weeks. *Hitlerjugend* [the Nazi youth organization] boys aged 16-17 kept guard, firing isolated shots into the marching ranks, just for their amusement. In addition, it was already quite "accepted" to do away with stragglers.

One morning the Jews were surprised to discover that their young brutal guards had been replaced by older ones. These new guards did not watch over them as closely as their predecessors, and even let them go part of the way completely unguarded. As the guards grew lax, opportunities arose to escape, but there was nowhere to escape to; they were cut off in the high snow-covered alps which offered no place to hide. The Jews continued to march.

Poor Austrian peasants, who met the starving Jews, opened their scanty stores to them. They gave the Jews potatoes and even apples, a rare commodity in those days. (The Austrians were usually very anti-Semitic. Maybe the unusual behavior of these peasants is to be explained by the fact that in this remote region the peasants did not act as the rest of the Austrians). As they marched their hunger reached such proportions that the Jews ate live snails and weeds that grew along the road.

Mauthausen concentration camp

The marchers reached Mauthausen concentration camp in February (or March) 1945. At that time the camp took in masses of prisoners who were being evacuated from various camps because of the advance of the Soviet army, and it was filled to capacity. Israel and his companions were directed to large tents which were already overfilled, and they had no choice but to sleep under the open sky (in the European winter). Even on the open ground Israel found space only on a slope, so that by morning he had slipped down and was in a very unenviable state.

The death march to Gunskirchen

After three days in Mauthausen, Israel together with a large number of other prisoners was marched to Gunskirchen concentration camp, some 60 km away. This route provided many cruel death marches during these last months of the war. (Best known was the last death march at the beginning of May 1945, when the American army was already at the gates of Mauthausen; hundreds of marchers fell by the wayside, and perished in the mire from sheer exhaustion).

Israel reached Gunskirchen where the physical conditions were a little better than in Mauthausen. He was put up in a hut instead of out in the open, but there were no beds. There was not enough space in the hut even to stretch one's legs. They no longer appointed people to be in charge of each hut.

The prisoners were *musshenen*, as these skeletons of skin and bone were called. They were given "food" once a day ("In normal times", Israel relates, "even pigs would not have eaten such "food"). Starved and exhausted, they were on the verge of death. Many were so feeble that they could not extricate their feet from the mud around the huts, and they just expired wherever they were standing.

One day Israel volunteered to work in return for a double portion of food. He was taken to a large pit and ordered to throw in the corpses of his dead comrades. In the pit itself the work was even more awful: the prisoners had to arrange the corpses so that they would take up as little space as possible. From that day onwards Israel was no longer interested in earning an extra portion of food.

Liberation

The American army liberated the camp on May 5th 1945. The famished prisoners fell on the tinned meat that the Americans gave them. Luckily Israel ate only a small amount of this meat. The way they ate, after such a long period of undernourishment, led to severe dysentery. Many of the liberated prisoners got heavy diarrhea and died. Israel was taken unconscious to a military hospital in an air force school near the town of Horsching. The hospital's chief physician was American, but the staff - doctors and nurses - were German. For a long time Israel hovered between life and death, and the condition of most of his comrades was not much better. They were so weak that they did not have the strength to get into their beds. For many the liberation came too late and they died.

In the hospital, too, the ex-prisoners suffered shortages. One of those in the room (they were 6-7 patients to a room), who had regained some strength, would go out and steal food and share it out among his roommates. Apparently the hospital was poorly organized, and although a lot of food accumulated in the stored, it was not given out to the patients. The Americans treated the prisoners from the concentration camps as normal patients coming for treatment in peacetime. They were not aware of the real needs of the prisoners who had just been liberated, and did not give them the treatment they needed. There was a lack of communication and of understanding between the liberators - who came from American affluence, and between those who had been liberated - who were weak and starving.

The ex-prisoners had been liberated but they were not free. The Americans who were in charge of order in the camp did not let the prisoners leave even after they had recuperated and were no longer in need of medical treatment. There came a stage when power struggles of prestige began between the Russians and the Americans as to who should hold the liberated area. Every time there was the prospect of an agreement that the area where Israel and his comrades were, was to be handed over to the Russians, the Americans moved them to a camp which was to remain under their control. This way they were moved around several times, until their camp finally came under Russian rule. Israel and his friends were pleased at this, because the Americans did not allow them to return home - to Romania - which was under Russian rule. As soon as the camp and its inmates passed into Russian rule, the longed-for permission was at last given.

On the way home

The Russians let Israel return home, but they sent him together with several hundred other released prisoners, on foot and without food. On the way they caught some chickens and thus solved the food problem on the first day. The Russian guards escorting them lodged the group for the night under the open sky, in a fenced-off area that apparently served as a sheep pen. In the morning there was no sign of the guards.

The natives of Simleul Silvaniei - a group of about ten youths - decided to continue their journey on their own. They went on foot to the railway station, although passenger trains were not yet working regularly. At the station stood a single engine with its freight car (loaded with coal, fuel to run the engine). In return for American cigarettes, all ten were allowed to climb on the freight car and sit on the coal. At the start of the journey the wind whistled in their ears, but as the journey continued, the amount of coal decreased, and by the time they reached Vienna they no longer felt the wind and also no longer saw the scenery.

Israel and his friends returned to Simleul Silvaniei in September 1945, a year after Northern Transylvania was liberated by the Russians.

In 1961 Israel made *Aliya* together with his wife Seren and his daughter Gabriella, and settled in Tel Aviv. Here his three grandchildren were born.

Chapter 17

Mondi Weisz's Wanderings

Ze'ev Weisz's marriage

Oradea (Grosswardein) was the city with the largest Jewish population in Transylvania (17,000 Jews in 1920). When Ze'ev (Volvi), Aunt Netti's third son, reached marriageable age, Rabbi Binyamin Fuchs, the Chief Rabbi of the city, wanted Ze'ev as a match for his daughter, Sheindel. At the time Ze'ev was one of the outstanding students at the Yeshiva of Rabbi Jozsef Zevi Duschinsky in the city of Chust. Aunt Netti and Oren Leib objected strongly to the match, despite the fine lineage of the intended bride's family, because they assumed that the only daughter of a renowned rabbi, (she had one brother), being used to servants, was liable to be spoilt, and would not know how to run the house of a businessman.

Uncle Kassiel, hearing details of the event from his sister Netti, decided to "test" the matter closely. Kassiel dressed up as a beggar and traveled to the Rabbi's house. The intended bride opened the door and asked the "beggar" whether he had already eaten that day. On receiving a negative reply she admitted him to the house and personally saw to it that he was given something to eat. At the end of the meal the "beggar" even received alms. Kassiel returned to Simleul Silvaniei and the match was concluded shortly afterwards (1922).

Ze'ev and his Family

Ze'ev and Sheindel settled in Oradea. They had three children: Moshe Hersh (Mondi), the eldest, Jozsef Yochanan, and lastly a daughter called Yetta.

Ze'ev traded in leather. Besides his business he was the vice-president of "*Chevrat Shass*" which was a bastion of Talmud study and ran a synagogue and *Beit Midrash*. The finest scholars of the city belonged to this *Beit Midrash* where only the most meticulous observers of the commandments were accepted. Every morning before prayers Ze'ev would teach a page of the *Gemara* in *Chevrat Shass*. He was also responsible for organizing the study of the *Gemara* on Sabbath afternoon, and he was one of the scholars who taught this. Ze'ev followed in the path of his mentor and teacher, Rabbi Duschinski, who held extreme religious views and was a vehement opponent of Zionism. (Rabbi Duschinsky made *Aliya* in 1933 and was appointed head of the *Eidah Hareidit* [strictly orthodox rabbinic authority] in Jerusalem).

Straight after Passover 5704 (1944), shortly after the Germans entered Hungary, Mondi was enlisted to the labor service battalions in the Hungarian army. Thus, through forced labor, Mondi was saved from deportation to Auschwitz. His parents, his brother and sister were herded into the Oradea Ghetto - the second largest ghetto (after the Budapest Ghetto) in Hungary. The 20,000 Jews of the city were rounded up in a small space round the great synagogue, under very crowded conditions - 15 people to a room. The deportations to Auschwitz began at the end of May 1944 and the last transport left on June 27th the same year. Ze'ev and Sheindel perished in Auschwitz together with their son, Jozsef aged 18 and their daughter Yetta who was 13.

Mondi's forced labor

Mondi was stationed with one of two service battalions of Transylvanian Jews that were sent to Novi Sad in Serbia. The 350 Jews who manned the battalions were employed in constructing and maintaining the training fields for Hungarian army officers' school. When the army moved into areas under the control of the Yugoslav partisans, the Jews served as a human shield for the Hungarian soldiers. In the fall of 1944 the battalion was moved to the village Budateteny near Budapest. The

German command of the Budapest anti-aircraft defense was stationed in this village, which had a Swabian population (Germans who had settled in Hungary generations earlier).

From time to time the Jews were sent to the baths outside the camp. The soldier escorting them agreed, after receiving a bribe, to let the Jews do whatever they wanted so long as they came back clean and in time. The servicemen used to travel to Budapest, a half hour's tram journey. On one of these trips Mondi met the Honorary Consul of the Dominican Republic and asked him for a protective passport visa to that distant country. However, before Mondi managed to get the visa he was moved to another place. Two months after their arrival in the village of Budateteny the battalion was sent to work in a bauxite mine (a raw material from which aluminum is obtained) near the village of Gant, about 50 km west of Budapest.

But Mondi did not keep up his mining work for long. At the beginning of December 1944 notification reached the mining camp that protective passes were waiting in Budapest for Mondi and two of his companions, and the three were sent to Budapest. The journey which usually took only a couple of hours, now took two or three days because of the frequent bombings. When they reached the Budapest railway station at long last, the Hungarian soldier escorting them decided that the time had come to desert, and he released them.

Mondi and his companions were startled by the sudden freedom that fell upon them, because of the Arrow Cross gangs that abounded in the city, murdering Jews as they pleased. (These criminal gangs murdered thousands of Jews during the last three months of 1944 and January 1945, and cast their bodies into the Danube). In order to escape this peril the three gave themselves up to Hungarian soldiers they met at the railway station. The soldiers took them to their barracks where they joined tens of Jews whom the soldiers were already hiding. In the following weeks the number of Jews in the barracks reached several hundreds. But never fear, the soldiers had not, Heaven forbid, suddenly become Judacophiles. They regarded the Jews as a safeguard: they realized that the war was coming to an end, and they hid them in the hope that they would testify in their favor after the war. However, their plan miscarried for some reason. At one stage in the retreat of the German army, in the last week of December, the Hungarian soldiers put their charges into the Budapest Ghetto.

The Budapest Ghetto

In the Budapest Ghetto Mondi served as a stretcher bearer. At first he carried stretchers with the wounded to a makeshift hospital that had been set up in the ghetto, and later, during the siege, he carried stretchers with the dead who were buried in a mass grave. Towards the end of the siege the frozen bodies of the dead were piled up in the courtyards and squares of the ghetto.

Mondi and his partner used to carry the stretcher in the middle of the road and so expose themselves to the enemy bullets. This was preferable to walking at the roadside, along the walls, and to risk being hit by falling debris from the buildings that had been destroyed by shelling. Once when Mondi was carrying an invalid the angel of Death came whistling by: Mondi was carrying the stretcher from the back, when his partner suddenly stopped because of a cat running across the street; in front of their eyes the cat was killed by the bullet and they remained unscathed.

The “liberating” Russians - from the frying pan into the fire

The Russians freed the ghetto on January 18th 1945. On the first day of their arrival a soldier gave Mondi some cubes of sugar and some pickled cucumbers, booty which the Russians had looted on their way to Budapest. After several days the combat soldiers were called back to the fighting and a different brand of soldiers came to the liberated quarters of the city - second line soldiers. The soldiers arrested all the men they came across, and after a preliminary selection sent the majority to a prisoner of war (POW) camp. The reason for these mass arrests became clear later: since the Russians had succeeded in taking only a small number of POWs from among the Hungarian soldiers, they understood that most of the Hungarian (as well as many German) soldiers had shed their uniforms and mingled with the civilians, and so the Russians arrested all the young men.

Mondi was arrested several times by the Russians, and each time he managed to go free at the preliminary selection due to the fact that he was Jewish. When Mondi was arrested the last time he

was not particularly concerned, assuming that this time, too, he would go free at the selection stage. But this time an unpleasant surprise awaited him: he was attached to a group that had already passed through the preliminary selection and so was not released.

The arrestees were marched out of the city. So long as the prisoners marched in an urban area, amidst people going to and fro, many of them managed to escape. The “escape” was not particularly difficult, for the group was large - 500 to 1,000 strong - and the custody was lax. Mondì, who knew nothing about the group and who had nothing to hide, did not feel like a prisoner of war and so did not even try to escape. At night the prisoners slept in a forest and in the morning on awakening found that they were surrounded by a fence. Thus Mondì became a prisoner of war. All the prisoners who had not escaped were now required by the Russians to fill the POW “quota”; there was no further selection among the prisoners and none of them were released.

In the POW camp

Mondì was taken to a POW camp near the town of Cop (today in the Ukraine), at the meeting point of the borders of the Soviet Union, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The camp had been a barracks for the Hungarian army which was converted for its new purpose. The POW camp was situated close to a railway junction and served as a transit camp from which POWs were sent to work in the east - throughout the Soviet Union. From the moment that Mondì arrived at the camp he directed all his energies towards not being sent to the Soviet Union.

The POWs, but for the wounded and the sick, were sent eastward in groups of 1,000 men. The groups were formed while the food was being distributed: the food was given out to groups of 100, and on the days when there were dispatches, a number of groups of “diners” were assembled and these were sent east after the meal. Mondì took care not to appear for the distribution of food on the “dispatch days”. On those days Mondì would do without food and hide. He would wait in his hideout until the arrival of new POWs and would then join them as a new prisoner. After a while Mondì found a way to avoid being sent east. When they looked for craftsmen among the prisoners he presented himself as a cobbler, and from then on he was employed in the POW camp to repair the shoes of those sent to the east. For Mondì, the cobbler, the gain was twofold; there was no longer the threat of being sent to the east and as a cobbler he got a double ration of bread.

The food in the camp was monotonous. At noon and night the prisoners received a dish made with peas: at noon it was a pea mash, which, in the evening, with the addition of water, was transformed into pea soup. The pea rations barely sufficed to subsist on. The monotony of the food disgusted Mondì, and he has been unable to touch peas ever since. The only time the POWs got meat was May 10th 1945, the day the armistice was signed between Germany and the Soviet Union.

The cobblers and the other craftsmen were housed near the office workers. Those employed in the offices were Russian speaking POWs, including German Communists who, under the Nazi rule, had been political prisoners in Dachau. Mondì became friendly with one of the German office workers, and it was from him that he heard for the first time what had happened at Auschwitz. After the end of the war in May 1945, a selection commission of the Russian secret police began working in the camp, to decide which of the POWs was entitled to release and which were to be imprisoned. This German official briefed Mondì as to what to say to the commission, and the investigator accepted what he said. At the end of July Mondì was sent back to Budapest together with a group of POWs who were subjects of countries that were Allies of Russia. The group marched to their destination on foot, a distance of about 300 km.

Freedom

In Budapest the POWs had to appear once more before a commission whose members were delegates of the Allies, and who examined the justification of their claims before releasing them. The commission members did not speak any language understood by Mondì. In an attempt to explain himself, he mumbled a few words in Yiddish, and so he was saved. The Yugoslav delegate, an ex-partisan, asked Mondì in Yiddish if he was Jewish. That same day Mondì was released from prison, with the advice of the Jewish partisan not to return to Transylvania but to go on *Aliya* straight to Israel.

Mondi was lucky in that he succeeded in escaping from captivity “quickly” - in July 1945 - and with relative ease. 20,000 - 30,000 Hungarian Jews fell into Russian captivity and only some of them were privileged to return to their homes; those who returned did so only in 1947, after peace treaties had been signed between the Soviet Union and Hungary.

The day after his release Mondi chanced to meet a boyhood friend from Oradea, his native city. This friend had succeeded in evading the deportation to Auschwitz and had returned to their native city almost a year earlier. He was running the family business and was now in Budapest on business. The friend took Mondi under his wing and together they returned to Transylvania.

In 1946 Mondi joined the “*Habonim*” [a Jewish youth movement] and was a member of its leadership. He retained this position until the Communist authorities dissolved the movement and the *Hachshara* group to which he belonged. In 1949 Mondi made *Aliya* by the most tortuous means. Here he married and lives with his family in Kibbutz Ma’agan. He has a daughter and a son and is a grandfather of two.

Chapter 18

“Journey through Hell” - the events that befell Matyi and Reska Weisz

Matyi (Mordechai) was Netti and Oren Leib Weisz's fourth son. After marrying Reska Gerstl, Matyi went to live in the house of his wife's family in Ungvar. Matyi lived an easy tranquil life in the spacious house in which his wife had been born. The house was divided into six apartments, and in addition to Matyi and Reska, her five brothers and their families lived there.

Ungvar belonged to Hungary and later to Czechoslovakia. In 1938, in accordance with the Munich Agreement, and until the end of World War II, Ungvar was re-annexed by Hungary and became a part of Ruthenia. Today the town is called Uzgorod, the capital of Carpathian Russia (Karpats) in the Ukraine, on the western border of the former Soviet Union.

Ungvar is known in the Jewish world because of Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried, a native of the city, the author of the “Kitzur Shulchan Aruch” [a concise compendium of Jewish law]. The book was first printed in Ungvar in 5624 (1864). Before the Holocaust more than 10,000 Jews lived in Ungvar, more than a quarter of the 40,000 inhabitants of the city.

Under Nazi rule

On March 19th 1944, the day the Germans entered Hungary, Matyi and Reska planned to visit their two sons in Budapest where they were studying at the university. The pleasant journey they had planned was called off, and instead they were filled with anxiety and fear of what was to come.

Very soon the anti-Jewish decrees also took effect in Ungvar. Matyi and Reska were compelled to wear the Yellow Star and their telephone was cut off. On the day the Jews in the city were obliged to hand over their wireless sets to the authorities, Matyi and Reska heard the daily BBC broadcast from London for the last time: “Jews, you will be forced to go on trains, don't board them! They are filled with poison gas. After you have got on, they will give you black coffee which has been poisoned”. But the broadcast did not tell them how not to get on the trains. It sounded so incredible that they thought it was just propaganda.

Like the other inhabitants of Ungvar, which borders on Czechoslovakia, Matyi and Reska, too, heard of the deportation of the Jews there. They also heard in 1939 the depraved Hitler promising to wipe out all the Jews. Yet despite this announcement they were incapable of believing that they were affected. They received information which did not penetrate into their consciousness. Their minds refused to absorb what was happening before their very eyes. They could not imagine - what is now common knowledge - that a people belonging to a “nation of poets and philosophers” would perpetrate base and terrible acts of murder and cruelty.

After the establishment of the *Judenrat* [Jewish Council: a body appointed by the Nazis to administer Jewish affairs under their supervision], the Gestapo began to extort large sums of money. In one case the *Judenrat* was ordered to collect two million pengo within two days. They explained to the Jews that as long as they complied with the demands of the Gestapo no evil would befall them. The Weisz's contributed their part and handed over to the *Judenrat* what they were asked for. But the extortion became progressively exorbitant, and within a few days Matyi and Reska had no jewels or valuables left; they did not even have any money left for basic commodities.

On the morning of 27.3.1944 three SS men appeared in their black uniforms at the house of Family Weisz, and ordered the 38 tenants of the house to leave within 40 minutes. The evacuees were

forbidden to take anything with them, and had to leave the house with only the clothes they were wearing. The house was turned into the Gestapo headquarters. They were the first Jews in Ungvar to be evicted, and each of the evicted families found shelter with Jewish neighbors. One neighbor, the wife of a brickyard owner, took the shocked Reska and Matyi into her home.

On April 19th all the Jews of Ungvar were notified, through notices that were affixed to the walls of the houses, that they were forbidden to leave their houses until the police came to take them to the ghetto. The brickyard was converted into a ghetto. The police went from house to house and from street to street, and in an orderly manner systematically rounded up groups of hundreds of Jews and took them to the ghetto. For three days Matyi and Reska saw the groups of Jews passing under their window on their way to the ghetto. In one of the groups Reska recognized her brothers together with their wives and children. They exchanged tearful glances. One of her nieces, a girl of eight, asked naively: "When will Aunt Reska come to the ghetto?"

Matyi and Reska were included in the last group to be taken to the ghetto. The nerve racking wait ended when three policemen, two in uniform and one in civilian clothing, came to the house. The policemen ordered them to remove their wedding rings, and they left the house with all they now owned - two shirts to change into. They joined the group of Jews waiting in the street, and marched with them to the ghetto. To Reska the "procession seemed like a funeral - our own funeral".

The Ungvar Ghetto

The policeman who shut the ghetto gate behind them knocked the butt of his gun on the head of the last person to enter. The man who had been hit fell in a pool of blood and died in the sight of his wife and their baby. This completed the concentration of all the Ungvar Jews in the brickyard. Together with the Jews of the surrounding villages and the townships, more than 18,000 Jews were enclosed into the Ungvar Ghetto in indescribable crowded conditions. Now came days of hunger, disease and torture. Matyi and one of Reska's brothers were taken to a cruel interrogation where they were asked where they had hidden money and diamonds. They returned bruised, injured and covered in blood.

The sanitary conditions in the overcrowded ghetto were abominable, and soon disease and contagion erupted, taking its heavy toll. As the epidemic broke out rumors spread that the inmates of the ghetto would remain in quarantine for at least two months. In spite of the hunger and the difficult conditions, these rumors filled the prisoners' hearts with hope. A few days later these hopes were dashed, when in the middle of May the *Judenrat* announced that deportation was at hand.

The ghetto began to empty. Every few days a group of 1,500 - 3,000 people were taken to the railway station. The deportees were allowed to take with them bread and water for only two days. Matyi and Reska were deported in the seventh and last transport to leave Ungvar, presumably June 3rd 1944. This transport was also the last transport from the whole of Ruthenia, which was cleared of all its 72,000 Jews in the space of two weeks.

On the train

On the third day of the journey the train stopped for a few hours, as had happened several times during the three days they had been traveling. The 92 Jews, who were crammed into the coach which was closed on all sides, sat quietly, bereft of all hope, tired out and starved. A fat old woman next to Reska had fallen asleep, and her head had fallen onto Reska's shoulder. It suddenly seemed to Reska that a big black fly whizzed past her. Reska tried to drive it off, but failed. It was not a fly but a bullet fired from a rifle, and it killed the old woman on the spot. Some more shots were fired through the wooden walls of the coach, and in a few minutes there were five corpses in the coach and the same number of wounded.

Auschwitz

Five days after leaving Ungvar the train reached Auschwitz. When the SS men opened the door of the coach and ordered the Jews to get out, there were 9 dead and 11 wounded on the coach floor; these were the victims of the "games" the guards played whenever the train stopped.

Matyi embraced Reska on the platform and so gave her a feeling of confidence. Reska also drew encouragement from the fact that all her family, her brothers, her sisters-in-law and their children were with her. Her thoughts were interrupted by the shouts of the SS men who ordered the men to gather together away from the women. Matyi was swallowed up in the group of men. Later, on Iyar 12th 5605 (April 25th 1945), Matyi was shot dead in Dachau, one day (some say - four days) before the liberation of the camp. Matyi was 45 years old when he was murdered.

Reska in the labor camps

After five days in Auschwitz and a number of selections, Reska, together with some other women who had been deported from Ungvar, was sent to Latvia, to Spilvec labor camp in a suburb of Riga. Reska became one of the hosts of slaves to the ignominious Nazis, and she underwent degradation, beatings, torture, constant starvation and hard labor.

Reska was transferred from Spilvec to Dunaberg, where she cleared away the rubble of a factory that had been bombed. In the course of their work Reska and hundreds of women prisoners were taken to dig a huge pit. At the end of the day, when the pit was deep enough, the entire group was shot dead by the Germans. Miraculously, Reska and another woman were not shot. They extricated themselves and returned to the camp secretly. The next day the camp was evacuated, and Reska was moved to Ponovez camp, to build an airfield together with another 30,000 prisoners.

With the advance of the Russian front and the German retreat, the forced labor camps where Reska worked were evacuated one after the other. Near the city of Elbing and in Neumark Reska had to dig defense trenches. Here, at the command of a Nazi guard, Reska became a “nurse”. The only medicine at her disposal was a bottle of iodine as a disinfectant, and apart from a friendly word there was no way of alleviating the women’s lot. When the Neumark camp was evacuated, Reska was once again saved from death: she was ordered to stay with the dying women who were destined for extermination, but in the commotion of the evacuation she managed to get caught up into a group of healthy women and escape.

Twelve days on the death march

3,300 women were marched out of Neumark camp, grouped, as always, in fives. They thought they were again being taken to another camp. Once outside the camp gates, the guards began their customary shooting into their ranks. 470 were missing at the roll call that was held the first evening. At this stage the prisoners still believed that, though the sick and infirm might fall by the wayside, the stronger ones, those who had escaped the bullets fired by the guards, would, in the end, reach a new camp.

They marched day after day, on and on, in the cold, in the snow and through storms, without food, without shelter until they were utterly exhausted. Women fell and failed to get up again, even when they were not killed. When the prisoners crossed a frozen river near the city Graudenz (now Grudziadz in Poland), 100 of their number were shot because they did not succeed in climbing up the river bank with the “requisite” alacrity. The Nazis laughed, taking pleasure in seeing the panic-stricken women slipping miserably as they tried to climb up the frozen bank.

The ranks dwindled progressively. Ten days after leaving Neumark there remained only 170 women. On the eleventh day of their march it snowed all day and they pressed on in an ever higher layer of snow. That same evening, the group, now numbering only 50 prisoners, was put into a small barn full of hay almost up to the ceiling. Reshka, whose strength had given out, decided to hide under the straw with some of her companions, and not to report for roll call in the morning.

Escape

Reska remained motionless under the pile of straw as the guards gave orders to leave the barn. She did not budge even when one of the guards came back and dug a pitchfork into the straw. Women who were stabbed with the pitchfork ran out screaming and were immediately shot in the courtyard of the farm. The shots and the barking of the dogs were followed by silence. Reska and another three of her companions came out of their hiding place and discovered that they were alone on the deserted farm.

Their 12-day fast directed their path and they went up to the first house in which they saw a sign of life. The woman who opened the door to them, sat them down in her warm kitchen and treated them to coffee and bread spread with fat. But they could not rest for long. Before they could finish their coffee, the master of the house came in and drove them rudely away. From his words they learnt of the fate that had befallen their comrades: "At the end of the village", he yelled, "all your lot were shot, and if you don't get out at once, I'll finish the job here!".

The women fled to the nearby forest and walked through the snow all day. After darkness fell they noticed some houses at the edge of the forest. As they came into the village they realized they had walked around in circles all day and they were now in the village from which they had fled in the morning. That night they stayed in the house of a poor old woman. The next morning one of the women died after gangrene had spread through her frostbitten feet. The remaining three continued their flight.

In the evening they found shelter in the house of a Polish couple who agreed to hide them till the liberation. These non-Jews told them that they hated the Germans, that the Russians were approaching and that liberation was at hand. It was the end of January 1945. Contrary to their promise, the couple drove the three women away after a few days, for fear of the punishment that was in store for them if they were discovered by the Germans. Reska wandered about for almost two months in German occupied Poland near the fighting lines. Sometimes she found Poles who were willing to hide her and sometimes she slept in the open field, although it was midwinter. Sometimes she even found work with the peasants.

A number of times Reska stayed in villages which were on the verge of being occupied by the Russians. Each time the German soldiers drove her far away from the front together with the other peasants. In the end, before the Germans managed to drive her away, the Russians occupied the village where she was hiding.

With her sons

Reska returned to Ungvar, her native city. Five weeks after she found her house empty and looted, and when she had lost all hope of finding any of her family alive, her two sons suddenly appeared.

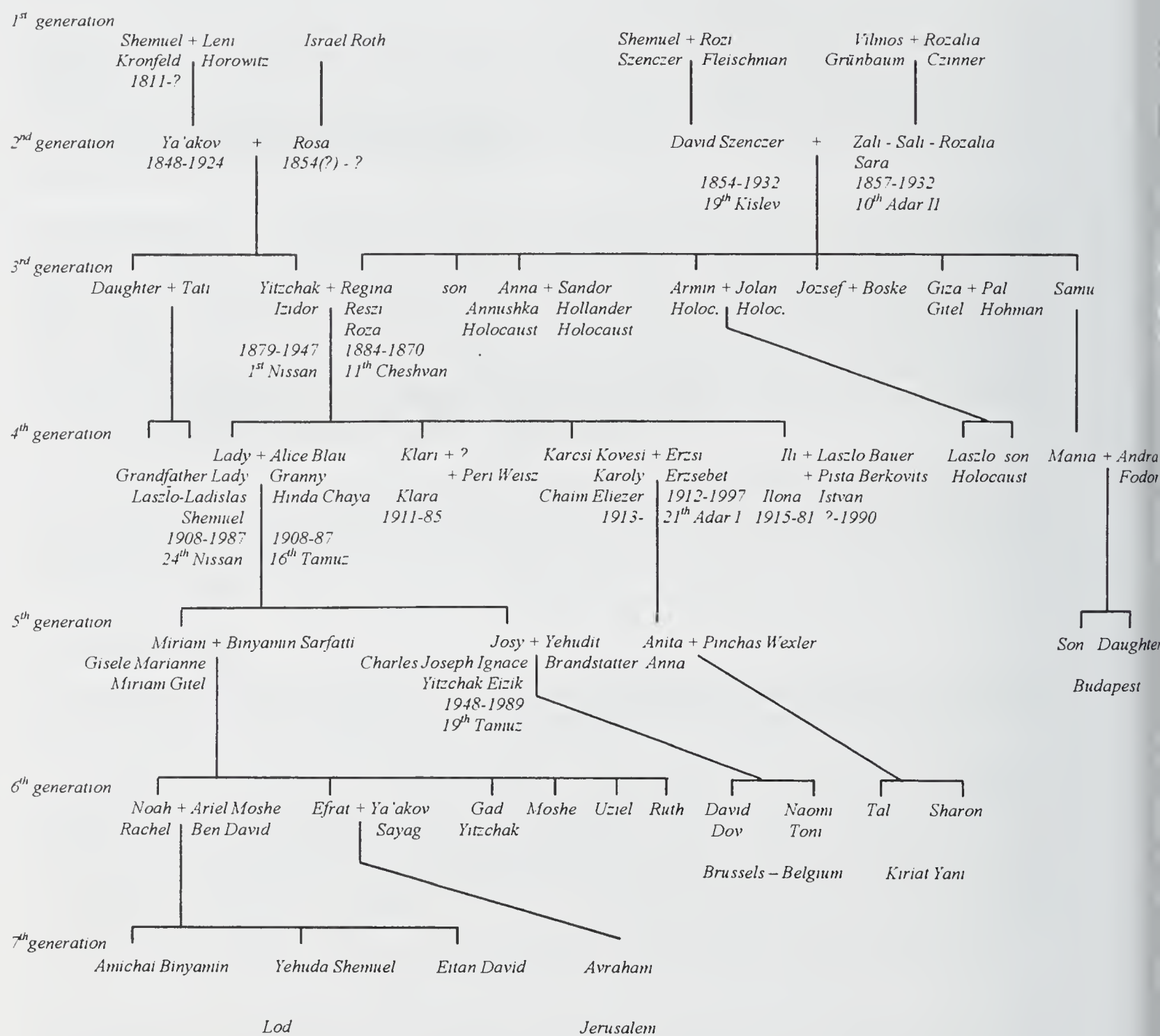
As mentioned above, her sons, Tibor (Shmontzi) and Koka, were studying at the university of Budapest when the German army marched into Hungary. Together with thousands of other young Jews, they were forced to march to Austria. Hundreds of them were shot dead on the way. Near Vienna, close to the city of Wiener-Neustadt, they were ordered to dig defense trenches for the retreating German army. They slept under the open sky in the rain and the snow. Typhoid and various other diseases struck down most of the youths. Tibor and Koka were among the 17 boys who remained out of the entire group when the Russian army liberated them at the end of April 1945.

Reska and her sons emigrated to South Africa in 1952, and set up their home there. Reska recounted what happened to her during the war in her book "Journey Through Hell". In her book she very ably describes the camps in which she was imprisoned, the sadistic guards, the torture, the trains, the diseases, the lice and all the atrocities that it was her lot to suffer.

Part Three

Family Kronfeld

The Kronfeld Family Tree



Legend

The information is in the following order:

1. The name or nickname of the person.
2. The general name.
3. The Hebrew name (where different from the general name).
4. Year of birth and year of death.
5. Date of death.
6. Place of residence of members of the last generation.

From the fourth generation onwards the brothers and sisters of each family appear in the order of their birth: from the eldest on the left to the youngest on the right.

Chapter 19

Family Kronfeld

My respected father, Lady Kronfeld, of blessed memory, was very proud of having been born and brought up in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. Of the entire family, Father was the first to be born in the great city. His parents and his grandparents grew up in the rural area of County Abauj-Torna in north-eastern Hungary, on the Slovak coast.

Shemuel and Leni Kronfeld

Shemuel Kronfeld, my grandfather's grandfather, was born in 1811 in a small village called Korlat. In 1836 he married Leni Horowitz. They lived in the village where Leni was born, a little village by the name of Inancs. These villages are in County Abauj-Torna, near the town of Szikszó, not far from Miskolc.

Ya'akov and Rosa Kronfeld

Ya'akov, the son of Shemuel and Leni, was born in 1848. In 1874 Ya'akov married Rosa the daughter of Israel Roth of the town of Szikszó (Rosa was 20 at the time).

In Szikszó there was a relatively large Jewish community, numbering about 700 souls. The community was established in the 17th century and included all the accepted Jewish institutions. At the time we are dealing with, Rabbi Shemuel Ehrenfeld, one of the grandsons of the Chatham Sopher, was the incumbent rabbi. Rabbi Ehrenfeld, the author of the book "Chathan Sopher" headed the Yeshiva of the town, which was attended by about 200 students, and it was he who performed the marriage ceremony of Ya'akov and Rosa.

The Jews living in the small villages near Szikszó, such as the Jews of the village Inancs, were affiliated to the community of Szikszó. On the festivals the Jews of Inancs would go to Szikszó to pray with its throng of worshippers, but on Sabbaths they joined those in the neighboring village of Beret for prayers in the synagogue on the estate of Family Silberger. Marton Silberger, who owned the estate in 1879 had the honor of being the Sandak [holding the infant] at the circumcision ceremony of Yitzchak Kronfeld, the son of Ya'akov and Rosa.

After the wedding, Rosa went to live in Inancs, her husband's place of residence. During the beginning of their married life, Ya'akov owned a shop, a kind of small general store, where the villagers found all their necessities, from groceries to nails and all the products that were needed on a farm. By 1879, when their son Yitzchak (Izidor) was born, Ya'akov was the owner of an inn in the village.

Ya'akov and Rosa moved to the village of Krasznokvajda. In this village, too, Ya'akov ran an inn. Ya'akov's daughter married a non-Jew named Tati. The family had it that this marriage was the result of her father working in the inn. (At the time of World War II Tati helped his Jewish nephew - Karoly - one of Yitzchak's sons). Ya'akov died in 1924 and his widow Rosa continued to run the inn.

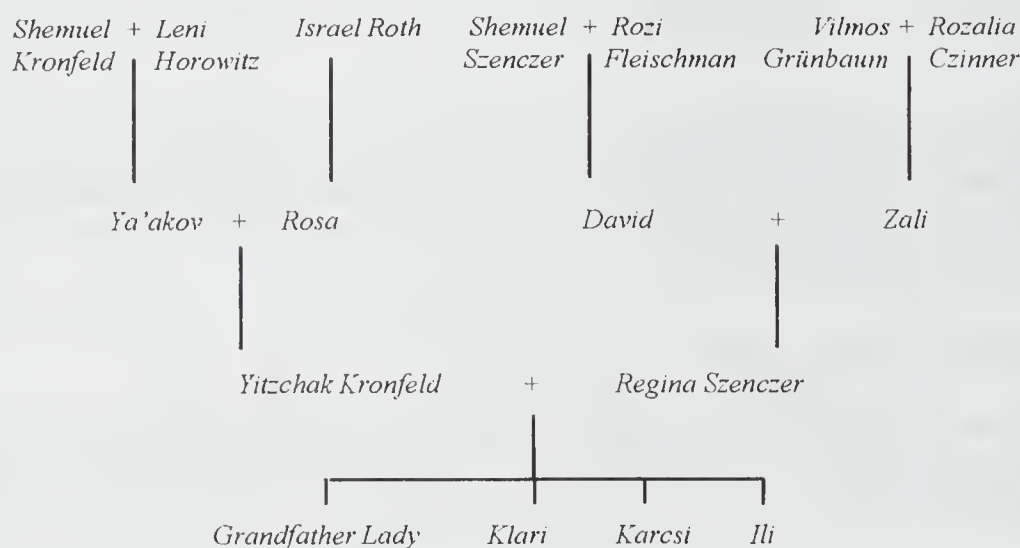
Yitzchak and Regina Kronfeld

Yitzchak, the son of Ya'akov moved to the capital Budapest even before his marriage. Yitzchak, though good-hearted, kept himself to himself, and hardly maintained contact with his family who remained in the village. He kept himself by doing simple joinery work, making doors and door posts. In the year 5668 (11.2.1908) Yitzchak married Regina-Reszi Szenczer.

On the 10th of Kislev 5669 (4.12.1908) my respected father, Shemuel, the firstborn son of Yitzchak and Regina Kronfeld was born. My father was called Shemuel after two of his great-grandfathers, Shemuel Kronfeld and Shemuel Szenczer. His name was Laszlo in Hungarian, and he was

affectionally called Lacsí. Later in Belgium, he was called Ladislás, Lady for short. His grandchildren in Israel called him Grandfather Lady.

Klara (Klari) was born in 1911. Two years later, in 1913, Karcsi was born (Károly in Hungarian, Carlos in Spanish). At his circumcision ceremony his father called him Chaim Eliezer. Ili (Ilona) was born last in 1915(?).



Note: This is only a section of the family tree; for a detailed family tree see p. 104

Family Szenczer

David Szenczer, Regina Kronfeld's father, my father's grandfather, was born in 1854 in the village of Csakany; his parents were Shemuel Szenczer and Rozi Fleischman. David Szenczer's wife, Zali (Sara), the daughter of Vilmos Grünbaum and Rozalia Czinner, was born in 1857 in the village of Pany.

David and Zali were married on 5.8.1879 in Pany. They lived in the town of Szepesi (Moldava n. Bodvou) near the city of Kosice in County Abauj-Torna (the same county in which Family Kronfeld lived).

With the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1919 the county was divided in two: the capital (the city of Kosice) and the surrounding area was joined to Czechoslovakia; the border between Hungary and Czechoslovakia ran through Szepesi. In 1938 the area returned to Hungarian sovereignty. Since the end of World War II until 1993 the town of Szepesi has been part of Czechoslovakia - today Slovakia.

The Jewish community of Szepesi was founded in 1825. The community had a rabbi and a "Shochet" and the usual Jewish institutions were active there: a "heder" where the children of Szepesi and the surrounding villages learnt, a ritual burial society, charity organizations and women's groups. The synagogue was built in 1853 on the banks of the River Bodva. A "mikveh", an abattoir, and apartments for the Rabbi and the "Shochet" were built in the courtyard of the synagogue.

The town of Szepesi, situated along the bank of the River Bodva and encompassed by forests, seemed like a village to Grandfather Lady. David Szenczer's house stood right on the border, and the border divided the kitchen in half. To this day I don't know whether the cow in her shed was considered to be Hungarian or Slovakian. Close to the house was David's carpentry workshop, where he made doors, windows and coffins as the need arose. The carpentry trade was handed down from father to son: it was also the trade of his son-in-law, Yitzhak Kronfeld, and that of his grandson (my father) - Grandfather Lady.

David and Zali Szenczer had seven children: four sons - Samu, Armin, József and another son who went to America and his whereabouts were unknown; and three daughters - Giza, Anna (Annushka) and Regina - my father's mother, who was born on 16.4.1884.

Grandfather Lady and his brother loved visiting their grandparents and uncles and aunts in Szepsi. There was an especially affectionate bond between Grandfather Lady and his Aunt Giza who had no children. Later Grandfather Lady was to call me after her by the name of Gitel - the Hebrew name for Giza. Giza lived in Janok, a village near Szepsi. After her divorce she moved to the city of Ozd, where her sister, Anushka lived. Giza died before World War II.

David and Zali Szenczer died in Szepsi. Zali died of diabetes at the age of 74 on the 10th of Adar II 5692 (18.3.1932); David passed away, aged 79, on the 19th of Kislev 5693 (18.12.1932) after suffering from intestinal obstruction.

Armin and Jozsef continued to live in Szepsi. Armin together with his wife and two sons perished in the Holocaust, as did Jozsef and his wife. After Passover 5704, the oppressors rounded up the families of Armin and Jozsef, together with all the Jews of Szepsi in the state school, and from there they moved them to the ghetto in the city of Kosice (on the outskirts of Kosice two brickyards were turned into ghettos). The 15,000 Jews who were crowded into the ghetto were deported to Auschwitz in May and the beginning of June 1944. Szepsi, whose community numbered 300 Jews before the war, is now completely empty of Jews.

At the beginning of the century Samu moved to Budapest and lived there with his family. They came out of the war unscathed. Annushka and her husband perished in the Holocaust. Regina, of whom I shall tell later, survived, and later became my grandmother.

Mania, Samu's daughter, married Andras Fodor, who was an officer in the standing army of Communist Hungary. Andras was promoted, and feared lest his being Jewish should be detrimental to the continuation of his military service. He was careful, therefore, to conceal the fact that he was Jewish, and removed every vestige of Judaism from his house and family. He got rid of all his Jewish appurtenances, even those handed down in the family from generation to generation. So it was that we were fortunate enough to receive magnificent *Hallah* covers for the Sabbath and *Matzah* cloths for the Passover Seder night, all embroidered in the finest Jewish tradition.

Mania and Andras had two children, a son and a daughter. At middle age, Mania divorced her officer husband. She again drew closer to Judaism, and in 1986 visited Israel for a few months.

Yitzchak Kronfeld and his family during World War I

In the first World War my grandfather was enlisted into the Austro-Hungarian army. Grandfather Yitzchak was stationed on the front line between Austria and Italy, in the region of the swampy delta of the River Isonzo, in north-eastern Italy not far from the Bay of Trieste.

The River Isonzo formed the border line between the Austro-Hungarian and the Italian forces, and for more than two years trench warfare went on, with each side trying to wear out the other. Grandfather Yitzchak had very bitter memories of the long drawn out entrenchment in the marshes. During this period the two sides fought eleven battles along the river, until in October 1917 the Austro-Hungarian forces broke through the Italian lines, and the Italian army retreated to the River Piave.

The wonders of Divine Providence. While my grandfather was fighting against the Italian army, the grandfather of my husband was among the Italian forces. The grandfather, Gualtiero Sarfatti, a major in the Italian army (in due course he reached the rank of General), served as liaison officer and fought against the Austro-Hungarian army. Who would have dreamt that 60 years later they would have common great-grandchildren in Israel!

At the time of the war Grandfather Lady and his sister, Klari, who were young children were sent to their grandparents in Szepsi, where the lack of food and the cold were not felt as severely as in Budapest. The infant Ili was in need of medical treatment for congenital dislocation of the hip, but under the austerity conditions prevailing during the war, she was not treated properly. As a result of not having received appropriate medical care, she was unable to have children, and for the rest of her life she walked with a limp and had to use a walking stick.

Grandfather Lady's education

As a child, Grandfather Lady attended a Jewish school, and at home he received a liberal education - without insistence on observing all the precepts of the *Torah*. On finishing primary school he was sent by his father, Yitzchak, who was a joiner, to a vocational school which taught carpentry; there he spent four years learning joinery and furniture design. Grandfather Lady was an outstanding carpenter of the first order, and excelled in his field.

Grandfather Lady belonged to the Jewish Boy Scouts movement. He was very active in the movement, first as a cadet and later as a youth leader. Grandfather Lady had a lot of hobbies: we have in our possession the stamp album of the collection he made while he was still in Hungary; with his many friends he toured the length and breadth of Hungary. He loved sports, he was a football player and a member of an athletics club and a boxing club. Grandfather was an amateur artist, and some of the lovely pictures he created grace the walls of our home.

Grandfather Lady's emigration to France and Belgium

At the end of his studies Grandfather Lady began working at his trade in Budapest. In the wake of World War I and the economic crisis throughout the world, he did not find much of a livelihood, and he decided to emigrate to France. France was not interested in foreign workers, so, in order to circumvent the tough immigration laws in force there, he left for France in 1929 together with a football team from Hungary.

Grandfather Lady did not know one word of French. To demonstrate how little he knew the ins and outs of the language of the country in which he hoped to find work, Grandfather Lady would describe his first impressions as his train drew into France: large notices bearing the word "Sortie" (exit) caught his eye at the stations that the train passed through. It was only after several stops that Grandfather Lady understood that they were not referring to village names! That was his first lesson in French.

At first Grandfather Lady lived in Reims, to the east of Paris. There he worked as a carpenter, learnt French very quickly, and in his spare time joined a football team and a boxing club (until he got his nose broken in boxing). When the immigration authorities did not give him permission to stay in Reims, he moved to the capital, Paris.

In January 1933 the French immigration authorities, as part of their consistently anti-alien policy, terminated Grandfather Lady's residence permit, and he had to leave the country within ten days. At the time he was a partner in a small carpentry workshop that produced wooden cases for radio sets. Three days before his residence permit expired he still managed to deliver the goods to the supplier who had ordered them.

Under these circumstances Grandfather Lady left for Brussels in Belgium where the immigration laws allowed aliens to enter provided they were not employed. At first Grandfather Lady was a partner in several business concerns, but fortune did not smile on him. Thus, for example, Grandfather set up (jointly) a laundry near a busy railway station, but the soot emitted by the locomotives soiled the laundry that hung out to dry in the courtyard! In the end he found work as an illegal laborer in a carpenter's workshop. Pierre Bekefi, Granny's brother-in-law, was also employed in this workshop. I will tell of the turn of events in Belgium in a separate chapter.

Grandfather Lady's family in Budapest - the Holocaust in Budapest

Grandfather Lady's parents and brother and sisters went on living in Budapest. However, their immunity from harm was not long-lived. In 1938 the Hungarian government passed the First Anti-Jewish Law with the intention of putting all kinds of obstacles in the way of the Jews. Among other things, the Jews were obliged to prove that they had been resident in Hungary for three generations. In order to comply with the requirements of the law the family had to procure many documents in order to testify to the fact that they were long established residents of Hungary. A by product of having to acquire these certificates is that we possess documents telling the story of the family. (Some of these documents came down to me, and were of assistance to me in writing this book).

During World War II the fate that befell Family Kronfeld was similar to that which most Jewish families in Budapest suffered. The order to wear the Yellow Star and all the other restrictions of April 1944 applied to them as well; in June the law ordered the rounding up of all the Jews of Budapest in houses marked with a yellow Star of David (the “Dispersed ghetto”). They, too, spent a relatively quiet summer after Admiral Horthy (the regent of Hungary) opposed the continuation of the deportations to Auschwitz. In the middle of October of the same year, Szalasi and his Nazi Arrow Cross Party seized power, and once again the Jews of Budapest, and among them Family Kronfeld, were in great danger.

My grandfather, Yitzchak Kronfeld was caught by one of the Arrow Cross gangs who were in league with the Hungarian police. Together with many other Jews who were arrested in the streets or taken from their homes by force, Grandfather Yitzchak was taken to a concentration center in a brickyard in a suburb of Budapest. It was from this concentration center that the Jewish prisoners began the death march from Budapest to Austria, a distance of 200 km, marching 30 km a day. Grandfather Yitzchak was one of a contingent of 2,000 unfortunates marching in five rows. At a certain stage he left the file to urinate. One of the guards, deceived by Grandfather Yitzchak’s physiognomy (he bore a surprising resemblance to the non-Jewish Hungarian villagers), ordered him to move away from the line of prisoners and to make off. Grandfather Yitzchak was, naturally, only too happy to carry out this order with the utmost speed!

Family Kronfeld was put into the Budapest ghetto (the “Central ghetto”). Klari, like several thousands of other Budapest Jews, managed to hide among the non-Jews. On 18.1.1945 the Russians liberated Budapest and the 70,000 Jews who were in the ghetto, including my grandparents, Yitzchak and Regina and their daughter, Ili.

Two years after the liberation Grandfather Yitzchak died of cancer of the stomach, aged 68. This was on the 1st of Nissan 5707 (22.3.1947), two weeks before I, his eldest granddaughter, was born. Grandmother Regina died at the age of 86 on the 12th of Heshvan 5731 (10.11.1970).

Klari - Grandfather Lady’s sister

During the war Klari’s husband was called up for forced labor in the Hungarian army. All trace of him was lost and how and where he met his death is not known. One of the first serious problems that the rabbis had to solve after the war, was to enable the re-marriage of women whose husbands could not be traced after the war. After a short while Klari married Peri Weiss.

In 1956, in the wake of the anti-Communist revolution in Hungary, Klari and her husband, like many others, fled to the West. After spending several months in a refugee camp in Vienna, they emigrated to the United States, where Klari earned her living as a dressmaker. She became widowed, and died childless on the 14th of Kislev 5746 (16.12.1985).

Ili - Grandfather Lady’s younger sister

Ili married Laszlo Bauer, a gifted and successful businessman. Within a short time they purchased a spacious villa in the most prestigious location in Budapest. It was at this time that Ili was operated on by an eminent Hungarian surgeon with a view to correct the slight limp from which she had suffered from infancy. The operation was unsuccessful and brought about an irreversible deterioration in her limp. To her chagrin, her condition also prevented her from having children. The Communist regime requisitioned their splendid villa and in its place they got an apartment in an tenement block. And as if she had not suffered enough, her husband divorced her.

The severe housing shortage of apartments in Budapest during the Communist rule, forced the divorced couple to continue sharing their apartment. They therefore divided it between them by means of partitions, which did not prevent them meeting, much to Ili’s displeasure, in the public areas of the building. To the end of her days Ili resided close to her ex-husband’s apartment.

Ili’s second marriage was to Istvan Berkovits. For a living she did machine knitting in her home. Grandmother Regina was widowed for more than 23 years, and during all this time she lived with her daughter, Ili, who cared for her with loving devotion. Ili died of cancer in 1981. Her sister, Klari,

came from the United States to nurse her during the last weeks of her life.

Karcsi - Grandfather Lady's brother

During World War II Karcsi was sent to forced labor in the Hungarian army. The company in which he was stationed served in many places in Hungary, including: Izbek, Gyon, Dabas, Sarospatak, Borsa-Prieszlop, Szentkiralybadja. In July 1943 15 labor service companies, including that of Karcsi was sent to the town of Bor, situated in the Serbian sector of Yugoslavia, about 200 km from Belgrade. The region near Bor is rich in copper mines, and these supplied half the requirements of the German war industry. Most of the servicemen, about 3,000, were put up in the "Berlin" camp, which was near the mines, and they worked at mining. In the spring of 1944 another 3,000 Jewish servicemen were sent to Bor; these were put up in the camps in the region and set to work laying the new railway lines for the transportation of copper.

The servicemen worked in the mines under very difficult conditions, 11 hours a day, under the supervision of German foremen. The workers' food was rationed and they had to make do with a daily piece of bread and some watery soup. They slept in wooden huts, on two-tier bunks that were full of bugs. Under these conditions Karcsi fell ill and was hospitalized in the camp for a month. In the hospital, too, the food was scanty and of poor quality, but he recovered and returned to work.

Some of the company commanders and the guards were particularly sadistic, and imposed all kinds of severe penalties on the servicemen. For the slightest misdemeanor they would hang the "culprit" by his hands, which were tied behind his back. Like many others, Karcsi, too, was "granted" this treatment and additional forms of punishment, such as beatings with a rifle butt and starving. Yet, hard as the situation of the servicemen was in Bor, a more cruel fate was in store for them. Their fight for their very lives only began when they were evacuated from the mining region.

In September 1944, with the advance of the Russian front and the victories of the Yugoslav partisans, the Germans were forced to evacuate Bor. The first contingent of 3,200 servicemen, including Karcsi, left the mines on the eve of the Jewish New Year 5705 (17.9.1944), under the escort of about 100 Hungarian guards, and the march back to Hungary began.

At the end of September the 3,000 remaining servicemen left Bor. Fortune was on their side; on the second day of their march they were all liberated by the partisans.

The march from Bor to Hungary

Up to Belgrade, an eight days' walk, the situation of the Jews was reasonable enough. True, they suffered from thirst (the Hungarian guards prevented the local Serbs from giving them water), and from hunger (the loaf of bread and the tin of preserved meat that they got before they set out and which was meant to last them till they reached Belgrade, soon gave out), but only a few were shot on the way when they did not march in line, and some of them even managed to escape. Near Belgrade they stopped for three days. On the eve of the Day of Atonement, they were given porridge, for the first time since they had set out. There was not enough porridge for everybody, and the unlucky ones continued the fast that they had begun 4-3 days earlier, on the Day of Atonement.

The day following the Day of Atonement the Jews continued their march in the direction of Hungary. At night they slept in the fields or in the woods, exposed to the cold and the rain. So long as they were in regions populated by Serbs, the locals tried to assuage their suffering and tried surreptitiously to give them food. The situation changed after they passed Pancevo, and entered the area inhabited by Swabians (Germans who had settled in the area many generations earlier). An armed guard of these pro-Nazi Germans volunteered to escort the column for three days up to the Hungarian border. Already at the beginning of the trek the Germans murdered 8 starving Jews because the poor wretches picked cobs of corn or asked to drink water from the canal at the side of the road. Seeing this, 147 of their comrades tried to escape; except for one, they were all caught and shot. On the way, the Germans murdered about 250 Jews who were picking through a heap of rotten melons, for which they had actually been given permission. In addition to these murders they also killed Jews marching in line for trivial "offences", as well as the stragglers at the end of the column.

At the Hungarian border, near the city of Titel, the command reverted to the Hungarian guards, but the lot of the Jews did not improve as a result. Now these guards, too, began to beat the Jews

mercilessly and to murder those who were exhausted. Near Srbobran 20 servicemen were murdered because they tried to drink water; and 10 more were shot near Novi Vrbas because they were incapable of walking any further. On the 6th of October 1944 the column reached Crvenka, and spent the night in a brickyard. The next day 1,000 of the marchers, including Karcsi, went on to Sombor.

The rest of the servicemen remained in the brickyard at Crvenka. The Hungarian soldiers who guarded the brickyard were replaced by SS soldiers. The Germans decided to do away with the Jews since they "obstructed" the movement of the retreating German forces. Before the executions the Germans decided to break the spirit of the exhausted servicemen: at first they made the Jews run around in the brickyard and then made them stand to attention for hours on end. They terrified the Jews all day by shouting and firing into the air. That night, the night of Hoshana Raba, the Germans murdered 680 Jews; throughout the night the SS soldiers made the Jews walk in groups of 20-30 to the edge of a pit and shot them. In the morning those who remained alive in the brickyard were taken and marched in the direction of Sombor and Baja. On the way the German and Hungarian soldiers continued "thinning out" the ranks. Those who remained were transported by rail from Baja to a camp in the town of Szentkiralybadja.

And what happened to Karcsi and his company? From Sombor the march continued to the city of Mohacs. On the march, the guards fired on the marchers and systematically liquidated them, until out of the 200 men who had formed the company, only ten remained. All along the way the survivors were ordered to bury their comrades who had been killed. On their way to Mohacs, the guards ordered a group of Jews, and Karcsi among them, to lie face downwards. The guards walked over the necks of those lying down and murdered them one by one. Karcsi managed to crawl into the high grass and so escaped the eyes of the brutal guards. And thus his 450 km. march came to an end.

For a few days Karcsi hid in a trench feeding only on sunflower seeds. In the end, overcome by thirst, he had to come out of his hideout. In his search for water Karcsi was caught by Hungarian soldiers. After giving him some food they locked him up in a little room for the night, all of them knowing full well that he was doomed. However, even before daybreak the roar of the Russian cannons was heard and the Hungarian soldiers just melted away. The swift advance of the Russian front saved Karcsi's life, and now he was free.

Karcsi turned his steps toward the city of Baja, which was released on 20.10.1944. From Baja Karcsi went on to the city of Szeged, and was hospitalized. After his convalescence Karcsi worked as a volunteer in the hospital until the liberation of Budapest. He returned to Budapest on foot.

And what befell the other servicemen? Many of them met their death on the march and only a few managed to escape. Those who overcame the hardship of the journey and reached Mohacs were sent by train to Szentkiralybadja; their comrades who had survived the massacre at Crvenka also reached this place. After about ten days, the Hungarian soldiers began to clear the camp and the last of the servicemen left on 3.11.1944. They were marched to the German frontier and from there transported to concentration camps in Germany where most of them perished.

After the war

After the liberation Karcsi married Erzsi. He changed his surname into a more Hungarian sounding name: Kovesi. In 1948 their only daughter, Anna (Aniko, Anita) was born. After the birth, Erzsi fell ill and was not able to look after her daughter. The girl was taken to the home of her aunt Ili, who fostered her till the age of six, when she returned to her parents' home.

In 1957 Karcsi and his family got permission to emigrate to Argentina. In 1963 they made *Aliya* from Buenos Aires. All his life Karcsi earned his living as a decorator. At first they lived in Beer Sheva and Ofakim; however, the unemployment situation there led them to move to Kiriya Yam, where they live to this day. Anita married Pinchas Wexler in 1969, and they have two children, Tal and Sharon.

Date		Time		Location		Remarks	
1911	10/1	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/2	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/3	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/4	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/5	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/6	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/7	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/8	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/9	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/10	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/11	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/12	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/13	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/14	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/15	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/16	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/17	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/18	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/19	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/20	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/21	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/22	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/23	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/24	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/25	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/26	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/27	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/28	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/29	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/30	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000
1911	10/31	10:00	11:00	1000	1000	1000	1000

Chapter 20

Belgium

In the middle of February 1929 the international train pulled into the station in Antwerp, Belgium. On the platform were Blimi and Jeno Davidson, Granny's sister and brother-in-law, who had emigrated to Belgium half a year previously. Blimi and her husband were waiting for their small son, Ari, who was arriving together with his aunts, Granny and Buki, after a long and arduous journey from Cehul Silvaniei in faraway Transylvania. As I have already related, the two had decided to emigrate to Belgium and to join Blimi and Jeno, because they could not make a living in Cehul Silvaniei.

Granny and Buki, like Blimi and her husband, began to work in diamond polishing. Granny was an expert in polishing small diamonds for industry. The economic crisis that began throughout the world in 1929 hit the diamond industry as well, and after a year Granny found herself without a job. Having no other choice, Granny went into domestic service with Jewish families.

Jeno's livelihood also suffered, but he succeeded in securing a position as a cantor in a synagogue in London. In less than a year after his two young sisters-in-law arrived in Antwerp, Jeno emigrated with his family to London. He continued his work as a cantor in the same synagogue until his retirement. Jeno also performed circumcisions, and with the years, his services in this capacity were much sought after in London.

Wandering in search of a livelihood

In 1931 Granny and Buki went to live in Brussels. In Brussels, too, Granny continued to earn her living by doing cleaning jobs. There were times when she worked in the homes of three or even four families in one day. And in order to save the fare she would go on foot from family to family. Despite the strain this imposed on her, Granny considered herself lucky, because many immigrants were unemployed, whereas she had an income - albeit scanty - which enabled her to pay the rent for her room.

In time Granny no longer had to worry about having a roof over her head as she found work with lodgings with a lovely Jewish family of Polish origin. She now also had an opportunity to learn Yiddish. In their house Granny had to do the housework and look after their small daughter.

The work was hard - from morning to night with half a day off each week - which was the norm for domestic servants in those days. However, Granny did not feel humiliated because the family treated her with warmth, and regarded her as a person and not as a maid. Thus, for example, Granny ate the same food as her employers, and not the leftovers that were not fit for human consumption - as had happened at her previous places of work. (Many years later, when Granny was better off and employed help herself, she did not forget the times when she ate the leftovers in the kitchen, and she was always careful that her domestic help ate in the dining room together with all the family).

In 1932 Granny went to London in the hope of finding better work. She stayed with Blimi and learnt English at an evening school but she was unable to get a working permit. After a year Granny returned to Belgium. From that period onwards, her knowledge of English and her life-long friendship with Klara Katz - the daughter of Hungarian immigrants, were a source of enrichment to her.

Blimi and Jeno went on living in London till the end of their lives. Jeno died on the 7th of Elul 5743 (1981), at the age of 81; Blimi died after ten lonely years, aged 84, on the 17th of Shevat 5751 (1991).

The meeting with Grandfather Lady

During Granny's stay in London Buki married Pierre Bekefi, who was also a Hungarian immigrant, and a carpenter by trade. When Granny returned to Brussels she first of all set out for the carpentry workshop where Pierre was employed, to get the keys for the apartment. Grandfather Lady worked in the same workshop, and it was the first time he saw her. This was in May or June 1933.

After a few months' acquaintance, Granny and Grandfather Lady decided to marry. When Grandfather told of their decision to marry, he would say, going back to that time of poverty and loneliness in a foreign country, "we decided to unite our poverty". But deciding was quicker than putting into action.

Grandfather Lady was a Hungarian subject and Granny was Romanian. (After the wedding Granny resumed Hungarian nationality). Being foreign subjects they had to submit various certificates from their country of origin in order to receive marriage permits. After having waited in vain for several months to get the certificates, they decided not to postpone the wedding any longer. Although in Belgium the law does not allow a religious wedding ceremony to take place before the civil one, Granny and Grandfather Lady found a rabbi who was prepared to perform the religious ceremony without the knowledge of the authorities. In honor of the event Granny bought Grandfather Lady a new pair of trousers in the flea market, because the only pair he possessed were very worn.

The wedding

Granny and Grandfather Lady were married on the 24th of Adar 5694 (1934). The ceremony was performed in the apartment of a couple that Granny was friendly with - Family Lipinski. The wedding took place in the home of this family because of all their friends they had the largest apartment: it had one bedroom and a kitchen! In honor of the event they took all the furniture out of the bedroom, and so made room for the quorum of men who were invited to the ceremony. All too late, it turned out that Granny had not reckoned that the guests would come with their wives. Granny hurried to a shopkeeper she knew and bought on credit a cake to augment the fare. The wedding ceremony itself was held in the kitchen, since the guests filled the bedroom.

Five months later, on the 25th of August 1934, Granny and Grandfather Lady got married at a civil wedding in the City Hall. To save fare on public transport, they borrowed a bicycle, and Granny arrived at the City Hall sitting on the handlebars.

The difficulties of earning a living

Upon their marriage Granny and Grandfather Lady rented a furnished room, but they soon had to vacate it as they could not pay the rent. To save expenses they decided to clear a corner in the carpentry workshop that Grandfather had set up (as we shall soon see) and live there. The workshop, of course, lacked furniture, and they did not have the necessary money to buy or produce any. In the circumstances, Granny and Grandfather literally lived in boxes: one box served as a table, another as a closet, another as a chair, and so on.

Grandfather Lady, being an alien, did not receive a worker's permit entitling him to employment. So, shortly after their marriage, he opened together with his brother-in-law, Pierre Bekefi, a small carpentry workshop. To this end, they rented a building in one of the poorest areas in Brussels (36, rue du Remblai). The workshop was set up with no initial capital, and Grandfather and Pierre lived from hand to mouth. They would build a cupboard, sell it, and with the proceeds buy the raw material for the next one. They even bought the nails and screws in limited quantities, just according to the immediate needs - from one day to the next, or for the very same day.

Granny and Buki, too, both began working in the workshop. Granny specialized in applying the polish to the wood. She also did the accounts, for which she had a special fastidious method of her own: Granny kept a series of envelopes for the different accounts, one for the electricity bill, one for the water bill, one for gas, one for the rent, and so on for each item of expense. Before she used the money for current needs, including basic commodities including food, she would put into these envelopes the sums of money needed to ensure the payment of the different bills. All her life Granny

was proud of the fact that the business expenses, and especially the workers' wages, were taken care of before domestic expenses, and in this way they managed to carry on the business during the most difficult times. Granny also used to tell us that they never had their gas or their electricity supply cut off, as happened more than once to friends whose financial situation was similar to their own. However, this meticulous regime had its price: once Grandfather Lady fainted for want of food. From then on Granny changed the order of priority of the envelopes and saw to it that there would always be enough money for food for him.

Keindi

In the middle of the Thirties Keindi, Granny's favorite sister, emigrated to Brussels as well. Keindi was not deterred by the hardships that had faced her sisters, and hoped to find her niche in Belgium. She was granted a residence permit for Belgium thanks to her two brothers-in-law, Lady and Pierre. They, being the owners of a going concern, gave the authorities a guarantee for her upkeep and an undertaking that she would not work in the country. (So she only worked unofficially).

After two or three years in Belgium Keindi began to suffer from severe mental illness. Apparently, she was not up to the mental and physical strain that all the impecunious new immigrants had to cope with. Keindi was institutionalized in Brussels, and when her condition did not improve she was sent back to Transylvania. There she was put into an institution in the city of Sighetul Marmatiei, where she died on the 23rd of Iyar 5701 (1941).

Family visits

In the summer of 1936 Granny went to visit her parents for the first time since her emigration seven years earlier. This was her only visit, and her last, to Cehul Silvaniei. From then on and throughout the years until they perished she preferred sending the little money that she managed to save, and in this way support her parents who were in financial straits, rather than spending this money on traveling to visit them. Granny silently bore the heartache of the yearning for her parents, her relatives and her homeland. After the war Granny refused to visit Cehul Silvaniei: she could not forgive the Hungarian neighbors who in time of need forgot the good neighborliness of so many years, and instead denounced their Jewish neighbors to be murdered at the hands of those who sought to take their lives.

Granny broke her journey in Budapest in order to get to know Grandfather Lady's family. She also took advantage of the journey to renew her Hungarian passport and that of Grandfather Lady, despite the relatively great expenses this involved. A few years later, during the World War this attention to detail saved both their lives, as we shall see later on.

Grandfather Yitzchak also came once to visit his daughters in Belgium and in England. He hoped to find work and settle in the west. In England he was offered the position of inspector of *Kashrut* [ritual fitness of food], but he turned down the offer, as he was apprehensive that he could not fulfil this kind of work in good conscience.

The development of the furniture business

The furniture business in the Rue du Remblai developed steadily and the financial situation improved. The plant specialized in small tables and pieces of furniture, a line in which there was little competition and Grandfather and Pierre did very well. But success did not come easily. It was achieved by dint of hard work from morning to night on the part of Grandfather Lady, Granny, Pierre and Buki, and an insistence on high quality products and first class service.

In time differences on professional matters arose between the brothers-in-law, and these reached such proportions that they could not be bridged. They decided that their ways should part, and Pierre established a new workshop in another part of Brussels.

Granny and Grandfather Lady's empire

Granny and Grandfather's labors were crowned with success. The business thrived and sales increased, so that the premises in the Rue du Remblai became too small. In 1938 Granny and Grandfather Lady leased a complex of buildings in Brussels (58, rue Van Oost), in the middle of which there was a large rectangular courtyard. At one end there was a building that was suitable as a workshop, and at the other were the living quarters whose façade faced the street.

The workshop extended over two floors. On the ground was the heavy machinery: great saws used for cutting the long boards and planks to the measurements according to the blueprints; a lathe that transformed thick chunks of wood into delicate table legs; a polishing machine that was placed along the length of one of the walls, and which was used to smooth the pieces of wood after they had been sawn. This floor also held the veneering section with its heavy presses. A flight of stairs led to the upper storey where the furniture was assembled and had the finishing touches put to it. The polishing area, with its pungent aroma, was closed off behind a door that was always closed to prevent the dust created by the sawing and the filing to spoil the fresh polish. As time went by Grandfather Lady leased additional factory space in an adjoining building, and broke through the dividing wall. This area served as a storeroom for the completed and the semi-completed furniture, and as an exhibition hall.

In the oblong courtyard was a store room filled with pieces of timber, awaiting their "turn" in the workshop. In the courtyard there was also a stone lodge and a pit for collecting rainwater which was originally supposed to be drinking water, but during my childhood was used only for hair washing. In the middle of the courtyard there was a little garden with a cherry tree. With the passage of the years the garden was turned into a children's playground after a layer of sand had been strewn and a swing had been put up.

The building had four storeys in addition to a ground floor and a basement. The upper three floors were let out to subtenants, and Granny and Grandfather Lady lived on the first floor. At long last they had a real apartment. Two rooms on the ground floor housed the office and one of the carpentry store rooms. The rest of the space later became the garage for Grandfather's car. In the basement there were two or three stores for Grandfather's personal tools, and later also for his fishing tackle and camping gear for family holidays. In the basement there was also a small apartment, which was originally planned as servants' quarters, a cellar for the coal which was used for heating, and a laundry room from the days when the laundry was boiled in huge tubs and washed by hand.

The building, which had been furnished with the best improvements available before World War I, became somewhat old-fashioned as time went on. Nevertheless, the building met Granny and Grandfather Lady's needs for 36 years, until they made *aliya*. With the passage of the years they modernized the apartment, putting in conveniences such as hot water and a bathtub which, for want of more suitable space, they installed in the kitchen.

It turned out that, in addition to being fortunate enough to rent a spacious apartment, Granny and Grandfather Lady had a wonderful landlord, Mr. Victor De Ryck. This Flemish non-Jew, having had no formal education, began his career as an unskilled laborer. As a result of hard physical work he had become very well-to-do and was now the owner of many buildings. Despite his wealth he lived very simply all his life, in a modest apartment, and never bought a car. Mr. De Ryck carried out all the repairs in his houses with his own hands. I remember him, already advanced in years, standing on the scaffolding in the courtyard of our house and covering the wall with asbestos tiles all the way up the four floors of the building.

Mr. De Ryck was not only honest and decent, he was also very kindhearted. During the war and later, too, he proved to be a true friend, and his entire family followed in his footsteps: his wife, his son and his daughter-in-law. When Granny and Grandfather fell prey to the claws of the Nazis, the De Ryck family supported them, helping and encouraging them as far as they were able. At the end of the war the business was rehabilitated with the aid of a very generous loan which Mr. De Ryck put at their disposal without guarantors and without sureties.

War is imminent

Grandfather Lady and Granny were aware of approaching events. They analyzed the information that was put out on the media and tried to act in accordance with the conclusions that they reached. As early as 1938 Grandfather Lady had volunteered for the Belgian army with a view to help in the preparations for the war. On 29.9.1938, the day when the Munich Agreement was signed (the agreement whereby England and France yielded to Hitler's dictates, abandoning Czechoslovakia to German aggression), Grandfather Lady sent a letter to the Belgian Minister of Defense, in which he put himself and his furniture store (which had moved to rue Van Oost only a week earlier), at the disposal of the military. Grandfather's generous offer was turned down, on the grounds that the army accepts only Belgian subjects. Grandfather Lady and Granny transferred their liquid assets into gold coins and jewelry, so that in time of need they would find it easier to flee with their money.

On the 10th of May 1940 the German army invaded Belgium, Holland, Luxemburg and France. The Belgian army, supported by French and English forces, fought against the invader for two and a half weeks, until their surrender on 28.5.1940. Because of this hasty surrender 350,000 soldiers were trapped near the port of Dunkirk in northern France, close to the Belgian border. Of these, 215,000 were British and the rest French. This great army was almost entirely evacuated safely, due to the resourcefulness and courage of English boatmen and fishermen.

Granny and Grandfather Lady, together with Buki and Pierre, wanted to flee to England with the escaping army. Grandfather and Pierre were qualified medical assistants, a skill they had acquired ahead of time in preparation for what was to come. They reached the coast close to the place of evacuation intending to enlist in the army as volunteer medical assistants. The army did indeed enroll volunteer medical assistants, and they were allowed to be evacuated together with their families, but it turned out that the 36 year-old Pierre was over military age. Granny and Grandfather elected to remain in Belgium and not to desert their relatives, so the four of them returned to Brussels.

Preparations for carrying out the "Final Solution"

During the first two years of the occupation the situation of the Jews was similar to that of the general population. Despite the promulgation of regulations discriminating against the Jews, life was still normal. In October 1940 ritual slaughter was prohibited. Several days later an order was published defining a Jew in Nazi terms. In December 1940 the Jews had to register separately from the rest of the population, and lists were made of all business concerns that were in Jewish hands. The Germans took these measures because in Belgium, where all religious denominations enjoyed equal rights, there were no official data regarding the Jews (in contrast to the situation prevalent in Hungary and other eastern European states). Only 5% (3,000 persons) of the total of 60,000 Jews in Belgium dared to disobey, and did not register as Jews. These were Jews whose neighbors and acquaintances had no idea of their origin; Jews whose names and external appearance did not give them away, and whose names did not appear in the register of any community or Jewish organization. These were the only ones who could take the liberty of not complying without risking exposure by informants and the ensuing severe punishment. Granny and Grandfather Lady were, of course, among those who were compelled to register as Jews. In September 1941 the identity cards of Jews were stamped with the label "Jew", and curfew was imposed from 8 o'clock at night.

Since some of the local authorities were uncooperative and did not transmit the lists of Jews to the Nazi authorities, the Jews were given the task of collecting the information themselves. Upon orders given by the Nazis, the Association of Jews in Belgium (*Association des Juifs en Belgique* - A.J.B) was formed; this was a kind of Judenrat (Jewish Council). From March 1942 the Jews had to register with the Association and give their addresses. In June another regulation, the last to be announced before the deportation, obliged the Jews to wear the "Yellow Star". Now everything was set for the "final solution".

The furniture business during the occupation

In the spring of 1942 the Nazis intensified their pressure on the Jews and set about expelling them from the financial scene. In March the Jews were compelled to liquidate their business concerns in the textile and the leather trade. The diamond merchants were next and finally the other businesses.

By May most Jewish businesses, over 6,000 were ordered to close down.

On 4.5.1942 Grandfather Lady ostensibly sold the furniture business. A non-Jew by the name of René Debève agreed to act as a sleeping partner and he “bought” the store. The bill of sale stated that the value of the furniture store was less than 20,000 francs, because in transactions above that amount the seller had to transfer the equivalent of the sale to a closed bank account. Needless to say, that with fictitious transactions such as these, there was always a lurking fear that the sleeping partner would take over the business, in which case the Jew had nowhere to turn for help.

In addition to the official bill of sale, a secret agreement was signed between Grandfather Lady and the sleeping partner annulling the sale and stipulating a monthly salary of 1,000 francs for René Debève. By its very nature, the secret agreement could take effect legally only after the expulsion of the Germans. René Debève was a decent fellow who did not take what he was not entitled to. The arrangement worked smoothly until October 1943, when René Debève was arrested for his activity in the anti-Nazi Resistance movement, and was dispatched to Germany as a political prisoner. Mme Debève continued to “run” the business but she was not honest as her husband had been. When Granny and Grandfather Lady were arrested suspicions were aroused that this lady planned to take over the business. It was only the swift intervention of the landlord, Mr. De Ryck, that preempted the takeover. After the liberation of Belgium the business went back to Grandfather Lady officially and without any problems.

Warding off deportation

The deportation of Jews from Belgium began in August 1942, and the first victims received orders to report for “labor in the East”. They had to report in Caserne Dossin, in the city of Malines (Mechelen in Flemish). These barracks, which had previously been used by the army, were converted into a rounding up center for the Jews throughout Belgium prior to their deportation to an “unknown destination”, which in most cases was Auschwitz. From time to time a train pulling cattle trucks drew into the barracks and swallowed up its human freight. Each transport totaled 500-1,000 persons.

Because of the large number of those who failed to report at the barracks, the Nazis, that very same month, instigated an extensive search for the Jews. Soldiers and police would surround a block of buildings all at once and without any prior warning, usually at night, and the SS soldiers would go from one apartment to the next, examine the tenants’ identity cards and arrest those who were Jewish. There were also surprise searches in the streets, the shops, at bus stops to arrest those wearing the Yellow Star. Granny and Grandfather were not summoned to report, nor were they included in the random searches.

After the first arrests, there began the organization, within the Resistance, of a Jewish underground movement called *Comité de Défense des Juifs - (C.D.J)*. Granny, Grandfather and many of the Jews of Brussels were provided by this committee with identity cards that did not state the holder’s religion. These were genuine identity cards issued to the underground movement by Jean Herinckx, the Catholic mayor of one of the quarters of Brussels. Some of the true personal details were entered, such as the holder’s date of birth and photograph, but other details, such as the name were changed. The holders of these doctored documents could carry on with their lives without being immediately identified as Jews.

The Nazis had an index containing the names and addresses of about 57,000 of Belgium’s Jews, which they used in order to arrest the Jews in their homes. Later, when the Jews who were not caught began to hide, the manhunt became more difficult. The Nazis began to make use of informers, but with relatively little success. The underground movement gave Granny and Grandfather a list of hideouts not far from their home. These were attics, which Granny and Grandfather rented in case of trouble. They used to escape to one of these with a small suitcase which was always ready, whenever they received a telephone call warning them of an imminent search by the Nazis. An information network was set up to give the alert, and thanks to this, many Jews were saved. Many Belgians, who under normal conditions did not evince overmuch sympathy for the Jews, now helped them as they were being persecuted, because of their intense hatred of the German invader.

Up until the persecution of the Jews, Granny and Grandfather, each in their own way, had helped the poor, the immigrants and the refugees. They did so graciously and sincerely, so much so, that even 50 years later people still sent them letters thanking them. Now the tables were turned, and Granny and Grandfather were dependent on the goodwill of the Belgians. The good G-d, who repays the righteous their due, directed their path to the Righteous Gentiles of the World.

The protection of the Hungarian government

Until March 1944, when Germany seized power in Hungary, Jews of Hungarian nationality residing in Belgium fared better than the rest of the Jews in Belgium. Hungarian Jews in western European states enjoyed the protection of the Hungarian government. The Hungarian authorities did indeed impose severe restrictions on the Jews where finance and education were concerned, but at the same time they afforded them protection from personal injury, both within Hungary and beyond its borders.

In the light of the firm stand taken by Hungary, Germany's ally, Berlin instructed the German forces in western Europe to include the Jews of Hungarian nationality in the arrests but not to send them to the death camps. In fact, the Jews of Hungary living in Belgium were usually not arrested by the Nazis, and if they were, the Hungarian consulate in Brussels took care of their release, at times successfully.

Granny and Grandfather Lady were Hungarian subjects with full rights, thanks to Granny, who, it will be remembered, had legally renewed their passports during her visit to Hungary in 1936. Their Hungarian nationality protected them from being deported, but this entailed their having to renew its confirmation at the Hungarian consulate every fortnight. Despite the "Hungarian protection" they were afraid, and with good reason, to put their immunity to the test; they, therefore, took various precautionary measures, such as hiding places and the falsified identity papers.

The first arrest

What they feared came to pass. The immunity and the precautions were of no avail, and on 11.3.43 Granny and Grandfather Lady were arrested in their home. For three days they were held under arrest in the notorious basement of the Gestapo in Avenue Louise in Brussels, and then they were transferred to the barracks in Malines, Caserne Dossin.

In the barracks Grandfather Lady was badly beaten by the SS and suffered injury on his head, an injury from which he suffered for the rest of his life. After five days in the barracks Granny and Grandfather Lady were released thanks to the personal intervention of the Hungarian consul in Belgium, Mr. Geng. The consul, a native of Transylvania, and of German origin, was a good friend of Dezso and Frici Muller, a Jewish couple who were friendly with Granny and Grandfather Lady. These friends saw to it that the consul exercised his authority with all speed, and bring about their release.

On the day following their release from Malines, when Granny came to Mr. Geng to thank him for his assistance, the consul was amazed to see that Granny was "a shadow of her former self" after 8 days' detention, "all told". He compared Granny's condition with that of a woman who, having been released a week earlier after a detention period of several months, seemed, in his words, to be "blooming". The consul, who was sympathetic towards the Jews and who did much to help those who had Hungarian citizenship, was not closely aware of the conditions prevailing in the barracks. The woman who felt so well after her detention, naturally did not tell him that she had enjoyed preferential conditions in the barracks because her work was distributing the parcels that the detainees received, and, in collusion with the SS soldier who was in charge of the distribution, she had siphoned off the choicest parcels, the detainees having no possibility of complaining.

"Vacation" in the village of Mery

Following their arrest, Granny and Grandfather Lady, realizing that the Jewish manhunt was becoming increasingly efficient, decided that staying in Brussels was too dangerous and the time had come to move to the country. As early as the fall of 1942 they had rented an apartment in the village of Mery Esneux in the district of Liege. The apartment had been rented through the underground

movement, in addition to the hiding places available to them in Brussels. Granny and Grandfather continued living in Brussels, but after their release, as the situation in the metropolis worsened, they found shelter in this apartment. About 30,000 Jews hid in private houses and orphanages throughout Belgium.

The apartment was on the first floor of a small two-storeyed house, with the landlord living on the second floor. The owners, Fernand and Nelly Legros, were a pleasant and courageous non-Jewish couple, the parents of a two-year-old, (today Emile Legros, the doctor), and they received Granny and Grandfather Lady with open arms. M. and Mme Legros (as Granny always called them out of respect and deep appreciation) knew full well the great danger they were exposing themselves and their infant son to - immediate imprisonment and perhaps even deportation to the east - nevertheless did not recoil from extending help, which they did graciously, seeing it as fulfilling a humane obligation.

At Granny's request Mme Legros secured an apartment with one of the neighbors for Granny's sister and brother-in-law. Buki and Pierre came to live with Mme Stassart on the same street, Avenue des Ormes, in Mery. The four of them were in the village in the guise of holiday makers and hiked and cycled in the region which was fascinatingly beautiful. Grandfather and Pierre spent many days fishing - a favorite sport with Grandfather - in the little river flowing by the nearby village of Fechereux. In this rural area, where everybody knew everybody else, the reason for their stay in the village, extending well beyond the holiday season, was obvious to any intelligent person (and to any adversary or informer...).

During the long months that Granny and Grandfather spent in Mery (March(?) 1943 - January 1944), the furniture business continued more or less, and they returned to Brussels only twice, for short and necessary visits.

Informing brings disaster

On 9.1.1944, as Granny and Grandfather Lady were walking in the mountains close to Mery, Pierre was arrested while fishing, as was his wont, near Fechereux. A vehicle of the rural police took him to his apartment in Mery, in order to arrest Buki as well, and together they were taken off to the adjacent Gestapo stronghold in the fortress of the city of Liege.

It was not until the evening that Buki and Pierre's landlady came to the Legros family to tell them of the arrest. While listening to the story Mme Legros remembered that her small son had noticed, a few hours earlier, a yellow car driving through the street, an unusual occurrence in this quiet street in the little village. These events sounded a warning, and the home of Family Legros, which had changed from being just a shelter into the home of friends, now became all at once a death trap. Granny and Grandfather hastily left the house and went to spend the night in a boarding house in the village. Later M. and Mme Legros joined them and they spent the evening and half the night drinking beer in an attempt to assuage the terrible fear of the unknown that both families felt. (It will be remembered, a family arrested for hiding Jews was liable to suffer the same fate as the Jews they had been hiding). The next day Granny and Grandfather returned to Brussels by a roundabout route.

The next day the Gestapo came to the Legros' house and looked for Granny and Grandfather's tandem bike. Fortunately for Mme Legros, she had managed to move most of her tenants' belongings to the farmer, Collignon, who lived next door, and who agreed to take the risk of harboring the incriminating evidence. The identity of the informer, no doubt a local, has not been discovered to this day.

Two weeks later Mme Legros traveled to Brussels to return to Granny a suitcase full of clothes as well as money that had been hidden among the kitchen utensils. Later a trustworthy person was sent to Mery to collect the rest of their belongings. All Granny and Grandfather's property was returned to them in its entirety. The absolute honesty displayed by M. and Mme Legros was twofold: first of all, it should be remembered that this was wartime, a time when there was a shortage of the most basic commodities and everything was rationed; secondly, we are talking of property belonging to Jews who were being persecuted, and who, even if they were being robbed, would not have dared to lodge a complaint.

After the war Granny and Grandfather Lady did not forget their saviors. Their first journey from Brussels was to Family Legros in Mery. All their lives Granny and Grandfather felt indebted to their benefactors, and they gave tangible expression to their gratitude.

The fate of Buki and Pierre

Buki and Pierre were transferred to the barracks of Caserne Dossin, in Malines. In the barracks the Jews were separated into two categories: Most of the Jews were classified as *Transport Juden*, and they were earmarked for deportation with the next transport. These Jews were in fact deported to Auschwitz within three weeks of their arrival at the barracks. Buki and Pierre were categorized as *Z. Juden* because of their Hungarian citizenship. This class included the citizens of states that were allies of Germany or of neutral countries. *Z. Juden* were not designated for deportation.

The Hungarian consulate tried, unsuccessfully, to secure Buki and Pierre's release. From October 1943 onwards the Nazis treatment of Hungarian nationals worsened; they increased the rate of arrests and refused to release arrestees despite the consulate's requests.

So long as Buki and Pierre were in Malines there was continual postal contact. In their letters they, like all those arrested, asked for food, tobacco and money. In one of his postcards Pierre asked that his tandem bicycle should be kept safe. Granny and Grandfather complied with his strange request, in the belief that something valuable, money or a letter, was hidden there. (The bicycle was kept in the store room until I grew up; one day my brother, Josy, took it apart, but he failed to discover its secret).

On 19.3.44 Germany seized power in Hungary, and from that time Hungary ceased to be considered an ally of Germany. Exactly one month later, on 19.4.44 orders were received from the Foreign Office in Germany annulling the protection afforded to Belgian Jews who had Hungarian citizenship. That same day Buki and Pierre were deported, together with another 12 Hungarian Jews, on a special transport from Malines to Bergen Belsen - "transport Z".

In August 1944, when Granny and Grandfather Lady were arrested once more in Malines, a postcard arrived from Pierre. In our present estimation, Pierre had perished long before the postcard arrived. If this supposition is correct, then Pierre was forced to collaborate with the Nazi deception campaign, whereby deportees were obliged to write to their relatives post-dated letters bearing a date following the time of their murder.

25,124 Jews, almost one half of Belgian Jewry, were deported in 33 trains within a space of two years. Only 1,323 survived; Pierre and Buki were not among them. Granny tried to locate them after the war, but without success. Buki was 32 and Pierre was 40. May they rest in peace.

Back to Brussels

In January 1944, following the arrest of Buki and Pierre, Granny and Grandfather Lady rushed back to Brussels, as we have mentioned. They had no choice but to return to their home, despite the very real fear that they might fall easy prey to the Jew hunt. An additional problem that arose, and which intensified towards the end of the war, was the bomb attacks by the Allies. Rue Van Oost, where they lived, was situated near a railway junction and between two major Brussels railway stations, locations which were a constant target for the Allied planes.

The frequent bombings frightened Granny considerably. (The fear of being hit by air attacks led Granny and Grandfather Lady to take out an insurance policy with a ritual burial society, so that in case of death, they would be given Jewish burial free of charge). In May, when they could no longer take the bombings, Granny and Grandfather Lady decided to live with their friends, Decso and Frici Muller, whose apartment was in a less "strategic" and quieter area. However, as we shall soon see, the "quiet" lasted only a few days.

Arrested once more

On the 21st of May, just as Granny finished making the coffee for breakfast for the four of them, there was an unexpected ring at the door. Grandfather Lady opened the door and to his dread, found himself facing Gestapo men. As Granny saw who was going down the inside staircase to the kitchen, she was in two minds as to which identity card it was more expedient to show: the official one indicating religion, or the doctored one - the one without the word "Jew" - a word which meant arrest, deportation and death. However, a slight movement from Grandfather's hand was enough for Granny to understand that all was lost. The real document would save unnecessary torture.

Granny and Grandfather, like Buki and Pierre, and many Jews before them, had fallen victim to informers. The Gestapo men were accompanied by a Jewish traitor named Jacques who was in their service. Jacques, a former hotel porter, had been arrested by the Gestapo, and in order to gain his freedom, had put himself at their service. (It was this same Jacques who, on the eve of the Passover, a month and a half earlier, had led to the arrest of Aunt Leah - who was later to be the wife of Joseph Levy, the uncle of my husband, Binyamin - together with her family, who were hiding near rue Van Oost).

Granny and Grandfather Lady were now interned once more in the Caserne Dossin. The Mullers, who had brought about their release when they were arrested previously, were now arrested together with them, and there was no advent of salvation in sight. The Hungarian consul was also powerless to help them, now that in Hungary itself Jews were being deported in masses to the death camps.

Caserne Dossin

During the month that Granny and Grandfather Lady were caught, Caserne Dossin, took in 362 Jews. The conditions in the place were very difficult. Granny and Grandfather, together with Dezso and Frici Muller, were put into one of the halls in the barracks into which more than a hundred people, men, women, old people and babies were crowded. Double-tiered wooden bunks served as beds, and every internee was allotted a narrow bunk teeming with lice and fleas. The daily diet consisted of a piece of dry black bread, substitute coffee and thin soup. Some of the Jews worked in the kitchen and in other sections of the barracks; the rest were held in the hall most of the day and left it only for the daily walk in the courtyard and the roll call. All this time the Jews were waiting for the next transport.

Grandfather Lady volunteered to do cleaning jobs. Because of the mobility that this work gave him he was able now and then to get more food than the official ration. He would bring some of this food to the cell in which political prisoners were held. Once Grandfather was set to work cleaning the windows in one of the offices on the first floor of the barracks. The windows faced the street and had no bars. Here was a wonderful chance to escape, but Grandfather decided against this, knowing what would be Granny's fate when his escape was discovered. The next minute there appeared at the street corner a troop of soldiers who would, without a doubt, have shot Grandfather if he had jumped to escape.

Once one of the inmates was severely beaten because some valuables were found on him which he had not handed over when he was arrested. As a result of this incident Granny pressed Grandfather to agree to throw into the toilet a valuable piece of jewelry, an heirloom from her mother, which had been concealed in the seam of a dress, in case of need. The beating that Grandfather had got, for no reason whatsoever, at the time of the earlier arrest, was quite enough.

The Righteous Gentiles of the world versus thieves

The restrictions imposed on the Hungarian consul did not make him forsake his Jewish friends. Mr. Geng used his personal influence in order to prevent the Mullers and Granny and Grandfather from being deported to the east. The connections which the consul had made, made themselves felt, and although two trains left while they were in Malines, their names were not among the deportees. Before another train left the barracks Belgium was liberated by the Allies. Praise be to G-d.

The consul who protected the interests of Granny and Grandfather Lady did so although he knew that

officially they were no longer Hungarian citizens: official notification reached the consulate, according to which the Hungarian government abolished their citizenship until Grandfather Lady reported for military service (in fact, forced labor in the Hungarian army). Divine Providence, which guarded over Granny and Grandfather all through the war years, ensured that on the day that the notice arrived, the consular secretary, a well known anti-Semite, should be on vacation, so that the notice fell straight into the hands of the consul. The latter kept the information to himself and made no use of it whatsoever.

And there were other righteous people. Loyal friends, such as Mr. De Ryck (the landlord) and several more wonderful non-Jews, cared for Granny and Grandfather Lady during the time of their internment. These friends tried, unsuccessfully, to get permission to visit the barracks; they kept up Granny and Grandfather's spirits through letters, sent them parcels with food and tobacco (at a time when they themselves suffered shortages and rationing) and, to the best of their ability, looked after the property that had been left in rue Van Oost.

As against these righteous gentiles there is the anti-Semitic non-Jew, heartless and depraved. There were neighbors who mercilessly looted the property of Granny and Grandfather Lady, and unabashedly wore her clothes even after she had been released. These thieving, looting neighbors drew encouragement and approval for their base actions from the "enlightened" German authorities, acting on the principle of "killing and taking possession". During the very first week of Granny and Grandfather's imprisonment the Germans took the furniture in the apartment. In due course they looted the machinery, the equipment and the merchandise from the furniture store.

Liberation

On the night of the 3rd of September 1944, the SS soldiers abandoned the barracks and fled before the victorious Allied forces who were coming ever nearer. The next morning the 1,032 internees found they were free. Granny and Grandfather Lady and the Mullers did not want to stay in the barracks for another minute, not even to wait for transportation. They returned to the liberated city of Brussels on foot - a distance of 20 km - three and a half months after their internment.

General rehabilitation

In Brussels Granny and Grandfather found a looted home and a furniture store empty of machinery and goods. They had to begin everything all over again. Mr. De Ryck, who had cared for Granny and Grandfather as much as possible during the entire period of their internment, continued helping them after their release as well. Of his own initiative, and without guarantors, he lent them, free of interest, the sum of money necessary for the re-establishment of the furniture store. This was a very large amount of money, which Granny and Grandfather Lady had no chance of raising from any other source, certainly not on the terms on which it was being given to them. With the help of this sum of money they quickly succeeded in rehabilitating themselves financially and re-establishing the business. All this was at a time when more than half the Jewish population was dependent on welfare aid. Granny and Grandfather repaid the loan over a period of more than ten years, concurrently with the development of the business.

The remnant that escaped

In September 1944, after being hunted down for two years, Granny and Grandfather Lady were the first members of the extended family to be freed from the Nazi oppressor. In Hungary Nendi Blau and family Kronfeld continued to suffer starvation, exposure to the cold and the bombings, until Budapest was liberated in January 1945. Mondy Weisz, too, was in Budapest, but shortly after the liberation of the ghetto he fell into Russian captivity and was freed only a year and a half later - in July 1945. Lucu was liberated on a Polish battlefield on 21.1.1945. Reska Weisz survived the death march; she was liberated by the Russians in Poland in the spring of 1945. On 25.4.1945 Kicsi was imprisoned in Torgau camp in Germany, when the American and Russian forces, meeting there, liberated her. Israel Weisz was liberated on 5.5.1945, when the American forces reached Gunskirchen concentration camp - three days before the war ended officially.

After the war

Very slowly life returned to its normal routine. Survivors of the camps arrived in Brussels and Granny volunteered to work in the soup kitchen which distributed food to the returnees. This was one of the many soup kitchens set up throughout Europe by the Joint (J.D.C. - American Joint Distribution Committee, the welfare and rehabilitation organization founded by the Jews of the United States for Jews outside America. The Joint greatly assisted concentration camp survivors all over Europe).

Granny and Grandfather Lady were involved in another charity venture that operated among the Jews of Brussels: they took into their home three young Hungarian girls, who, on being liberated from the camps, reached Brussels on their own, having no relation or acquaintance in the town. These were girls aged about 20, who had passed through the Nazi inferno and whose entire world was destroyed. For more than a year they received not only board and lodging in the house in rue Van Oost, but a warm and supportive family. Grandfather Lady brought the joy of life into the home, and Granny lent a sympathetic ear to the cares, the uncertainties and the misgivings that naturally beset these solitary girls who perforce were compelled to live their lives in a strange and alien world. The girls knew that they could rely on Granny to keep a secret and to give them good advice in time of need.

In June 1945, on her way to help in the soup kitchen, Granny met a refugee, born in Transylvania - Uci Gold. Uci had been deported to Auschwitz a year earlier together with her mother and grandmother. These two had been exterminated in the gas chambers, while Uci had been sent to forced labor in Riga, Stutthof and in the German city of Magdeburg, 120 km west of Berlin. In Magdeburg Uci worked making ammunition, and in an accident in the factory she lost three fingers of her left hand. In April 1945 Uci was liberated by the American army, and since she did not want to return to her empty home in Transylvania, she got on the first train going west. It was only by chance that she came to Belgium.

Uci soon joined the ménage living with the Kronfelds. Once again they realized what a small world it is: once Uci was in Granny and Grandfather's home, it turned out that before the war she had visited her cousin in Cehul Silvaniei several times. This cousin was a good friend of Nendi Blau, so Uci knew both Nendi and Grandfather Yitzchak.

Granny tried through several avenues to find out what had happened to her father and her family. For example, through Uci Granny got to know a soldier from the Palestine brigade, who planned to go to Transylvania to look for his relatives. The soldier, Feffi Tibon, a member of Kibbutz Dalia, took upon himself to carry out Granny's mission. Feffi did not return with the hoped-for news, but since then, Hungarian speaking soldiers of the brigade found their way to the house in rue Van Oost. They would come to taste the traditional Hungarian home-made dishes and revive their strength.

During the year 1946 the soldiers of the brigade returned to Israel. Uci emigrated to America to be reunited with what remained of her family. The three young girls also got settled and found their way in life: one of them (Vica Bikar) married in Belgium, one went to America and one built a family with Otto David in Argentina. The ties of friendship with these young girls lasted for years.

Chapter 21

A New Era

The war was over and the terrors of war passed. The furniture store was doing nicely, and for the first time after a long period the future looked promising. Now Granny and Grandfather Lady prepared for an additional change in their lives, a change which symbolized more than anything else the new era that they had just entered: Granny was pregnant and due to give birth. On Passover itself - the festival of freedom 5607 (5.4.1947) I was born.

On the 22nd of Cheshvan 5709 (24.11.1948) my brother Josy was born. It was only then, more than three years after the end of the war, that Granny gave up hope of finding her father alive, and at the circumcision ceremony Josy was given the name Yitzchak Eizik, after his grandfather, Grandfather Yitzchak. Granny also perpetuated the name of Grandfather Jozsef, and in the official documents of the Belgian government Yitzchak Eizik was entered under the name Joseph, hence his nickname, Josy.

Granny continued working in the furniture store even after we were born; she was in charge and supervised the quality of the products. Under her directorship the store prospered and the number of employees rose to 35. Towards the end of the Fifties Granny's health deteriorated and, on doctor's orders, she handed over most of the burden of the directorship to a foreman who was hired for the task. Granny continued to run the business and Grandfather took over the job of delivering the goods to people in the trade, accepting new orders, and maintaining contact with the clients - all of which he did to perfection thanks to his good-natured amiability.

Granny and Grandfather Lady had the sense not to be slaves to their work, as sometimes happens with the owners of a business. They insisted on taking an annual vacation which they spent with the family. Grandfather Lady, who had neglected his sporting activities after his marriage, became a confirmed angler. He got to know different types of fishing and loved them all, and so tried to attract the family to holiday resorts that were close to fishing spots. We spent countless weekends at some fish pond or another near Brussels. During longer vacations we went to the sea or to regions where there were rivers rich in fish, either in Belgium or in neighboring countries. For me these trips were wonderful; we slept in a tent, sometimes in an open field or near an isolated farm. We met simple peasants who tilled their land, and we came upon all sorts of out of the way places of enchanting beauty.

Family life went on peacefully. Granny and Grandfather were members of the Brussels Conservative Community and kept a traditional Jewish household. Granny, who had been brought up according to the precepts of the Torah, brought us up accordingly, even if there was not always a scrupulous insistence on all the meticulous observance of the practical commandments. Josy and I did indeed attend a public school, but we took part in the Jewish lessons that were held there. Twice a week we had Jewish studies at the Synagogue, and for a certain period of time, at home, too, with a private teacher. For his Bar Mitzvah Josy read the weekly portion from the book of Genesis, and the appropriate section from the Prophets. My Bat Mitzvah was also celebrated in the Synagogue with a ceremony and a festive meal.

Granny and Grandfather Lady donated money to local Jewish causes and to the Jewish National Fund. Once it fell to Granny's lot to perform the ultimate act of true charity for a solitary acquaintance. This Jew, who had distanced himself considerably from a Jewish way of life, had in his will expressed the wish that Granny should take care that he be buried in the Jewish section of the public cemetery, and transfer his legacy to the remaining members of his family in Hungary. Granny carried out the wishes of this distant acquaintance to perfection and without any thoughts of a reward.

Josy

Josy studied business administration at Brussels University. In the course of his studies he took courses in Japan before the West “discovered” Japan and before Japan became known as an economic power. Josy did very well professionally; his specialty was the management of Belgian branches of mammoth international companies.

In Elul 5731 (1971) Josy married Yehudit née Brandstetter. Josy and Yehudit settled in Brussels. In 1974 Granny and Grandfather Lady were presented with their first grandson, David Dov. Two and a half years later, in 1976, Naomi Toni was born.

I make *Aliya*

On Thursday, the 5th of Menahem Av 5726 (1966), a year after finishing secondary school, I made *aliya*. In 1969 I gained my B. Sc.’s degree in biology. On the 19th of Menahem Av 5729 (1969), I married Binyamin the son of Gad and Rachel Sarfatti. Binyamin and I settled in Jerusalem.

Granny and Grandfather Lady make *Aliya*

When Granny and Grandfather reached the age of 65 they decided that the time had come to give up working. They were blessed with sufficient understanding to know when to stop, when the right moment had come, to say: “Thus far and no further”. And they acted upon their decision. In 1974 Granny and Grandfather Lady sold the furniture store through which they had made an honorable living for 40 years. At the time of the sale the store was successful and enjoyed a splendid reputation; in fact, it was the largest of its kind in Belgium.

Granny and Grandfather realized the plans they had made over the years, and on the 1st of Iyar 5734 (23.4.1974) they made *aliya*. In Israel they lived out the rest of their years in tranquility: first in Netanya, then for three years as our neighbors in Jerusalem. Despite their relatively advanced years, they acclimatized well, were completely self-reliant and were happy that it had been granted them to make *aliya*. They displayed an interest in everything that went on in the country, made trips from Metula to Eilat, made new friends and learned Hebrew in an *ulpan* [a school in which new immigrants learn Hebrew] suited to students of their age. Granny learned with such diligence that she was able to conduct a conversation in Hebrew.

They, and I, were granted to see the birth of our six children. Granny was a fairy tale grandmother. Neither the difference in age nor language difficulties impaired in the slightest the interaction between grandmother and grandchildren. Granny showered her grandchildren with warmth and love, and tended to all their needs - real and imagined. The grandchildren, for their part, repaid her in kind, and a wonderful relationship was established between the little ones and their grandmother.

Grandfather Lady did not play much with the children. He closed himself off in his own affairs, and watched the goings on from the sidelines; yet, in his own way he played his part. Despite his taciturnity the children loved him very much and enjoyed his company. At every possible occasion he would make items of furniture and gadgets in the “carpentry workshop” that was in the store room of the apartment in Netanya. His chef-d’oeuvre were the kitchen and bathroom cupboards that he built and installed in our apartment on French Hill and the twin beds he made for his grandchildren and which served us for almost 20 years.

Alas for those who are departed and are no longer with us

In 1978 Grandfather Lady underwent surgery for cardiac valve replacement, and, as a result, enjoyed another few good years. On the 24th of Nissan 5747 Grandfather Lady died aged 78. It was on 23.4.1987, the 13th anniversary of his making *aliya* (according to the civil date).

Granny died three months after Grandfather, on the 16th of Tamuz 5747 (12.7.1987) aged 79.

Granny and Grandfather Lady raised us with boundless love and devotion. They bestowed on me spiritual and material wealth as far as they were able. Words cannot express the great debt I owe them. Would that their good deeds serve as an example to their descendants.

Two years after the death of Granny and Grandfather, on the 19th of Tamuz 5749 (22.7.1989), my brother Josy died. For a year and a half Josy fought valiantly against Hotchking's disease. Throughout this time, and despite the difficult treatment he was getting, and although he was fully aware of the seriousness of his condition, he continued working almost as usual, and even raised the spirits of his family who were deeply concerned. Josy worked and was active until he succumbed, at the early age of 40. Blessed be his memory.

Today

Hanuka 5755. My daughter, Noah Rachel, is married to Ariel Moshe Ben David, and they live in the settlement Beth El. Noah is studying the history and geography of Israel and Talmud at Bar Ilan University. Ariel is learning in the Yeshiva in Beth El and in the teachers' seminary affiliated to the Yeshiva.

Efrat has finished the Horev *Ulpina* [a high school for girls specializing in Jewish studies], and has successfully passed all her matriculation exams. Efrat is doing her national service in the *Ulpina* in Meron, where she is a youth leader for the tenth grade.

The boys are learning in the Yeshiva Secondary school in Horev. Gad Yitzchak is in the eleventh grade and is preparing for his matriculation exams. Moshe is in the ninth grade, and Uziel in the seventh.

Ruth is in third grade. During the day she is an only child at home until her brothers return from the Yeshiva late at night.

My brother's two children, David and Naomi, carry on the Kronfeld dynasty. David is in his fourth year studying electronics at the Technion in Brussels. Naomi has finished secondary school and is studying the history of art at Brussels University.

I pray to the Creator that He should guard and keep my children together with all the children of Israel. May they be granted to grow up in health, in ease and in contentment, and may they find favor in the eyes of G-d and man.

Epilogue

Out of our widespread family there remained at the end of the war only a very few, a handful here, a handful there. During the years after the war, most of those who remained came to Israel. With time the wounds have begun to heal (if that were at all possible). The family has begun to grow again, to be fruitful and to multiply. Children, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren have been born.

The generation that had the privilege of being born in Israel and have not experienced the bitter taste of anti-Semitism has to know what happened to their fathers, and must impress the events on "the tablet of their heart". Without knowing the past one cannot have even the slightest notion as to the lengths to which anti-Semitism can go and what it is capable of perpetrating. Only if we remember what Amalek did to us, can we act in order to prevent another Holocaust.

The events related here are meant to perpetuate the memory of those who were lost to us and to tell of what befell those who survived. It is my hope that after reading this, it will have become clear to the reader what a great privilege it is to live in the Land of Israel and to continue the chain of generations of the Jewish people in the land that was promised to our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Just as in our time the words of the prophet Ezekiel have been fulfilled: "I will gather you from the peoples...and I will give you the land of Israel", so may it be the Divine Will that the prophecy that "I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a G-d" may also come true, and may we be worthy, with the help of G-d, of the perfect redemption speedily in our days.

Jerusalem, 5755

Appendices

The Blau Family Tree

1st generation

David Blau + Chaya Hinda

2nd generation

Moshe Jozsef + Miriam Roth

3rd generation

Yitzchak Eizik + 1. Channah Esther Bracha Nussbächer
2. Leah Nussbächer

Yettel + Kassiel Nussbächer

Armin + Margit Lev

Son 1898-1901

4th generation

descendants
see branch of
Yitzchak Eizik Blau
p. 134

descendants
see branch of
Kassiel Nussbächer
p. 150

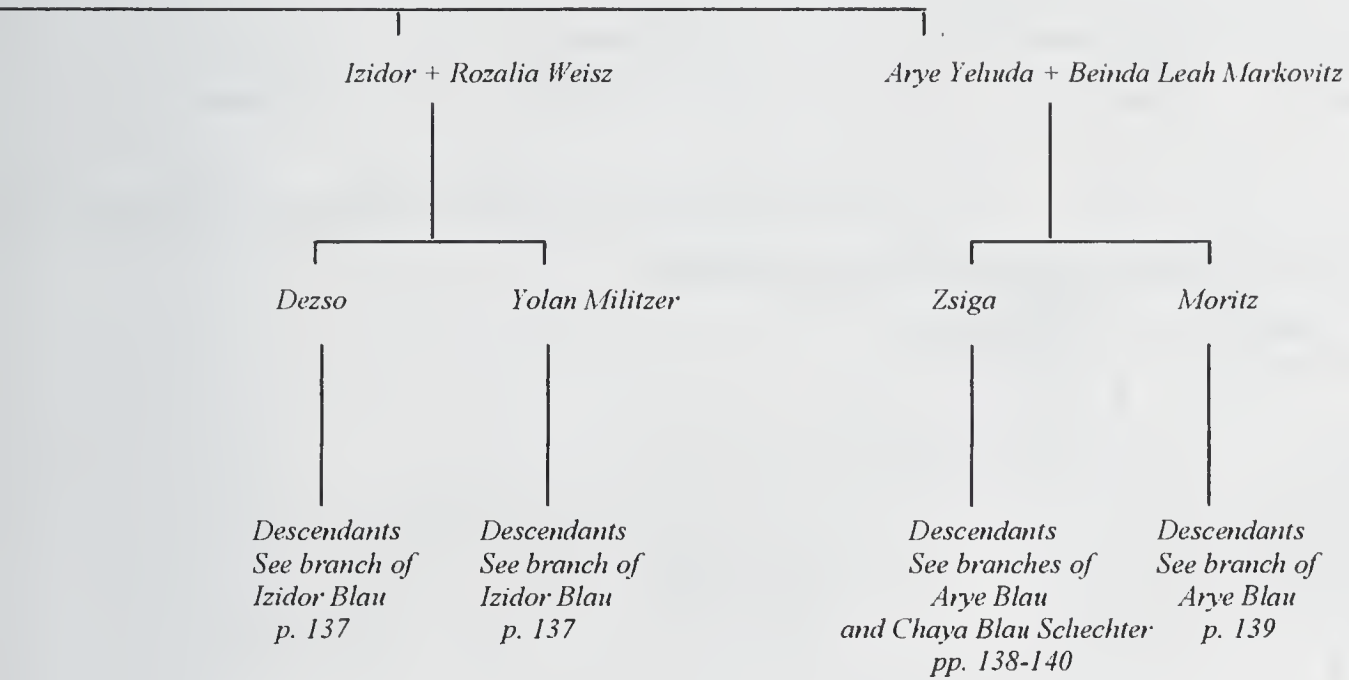
descendants
see branch of
Armin Blau
p. 136

Legend

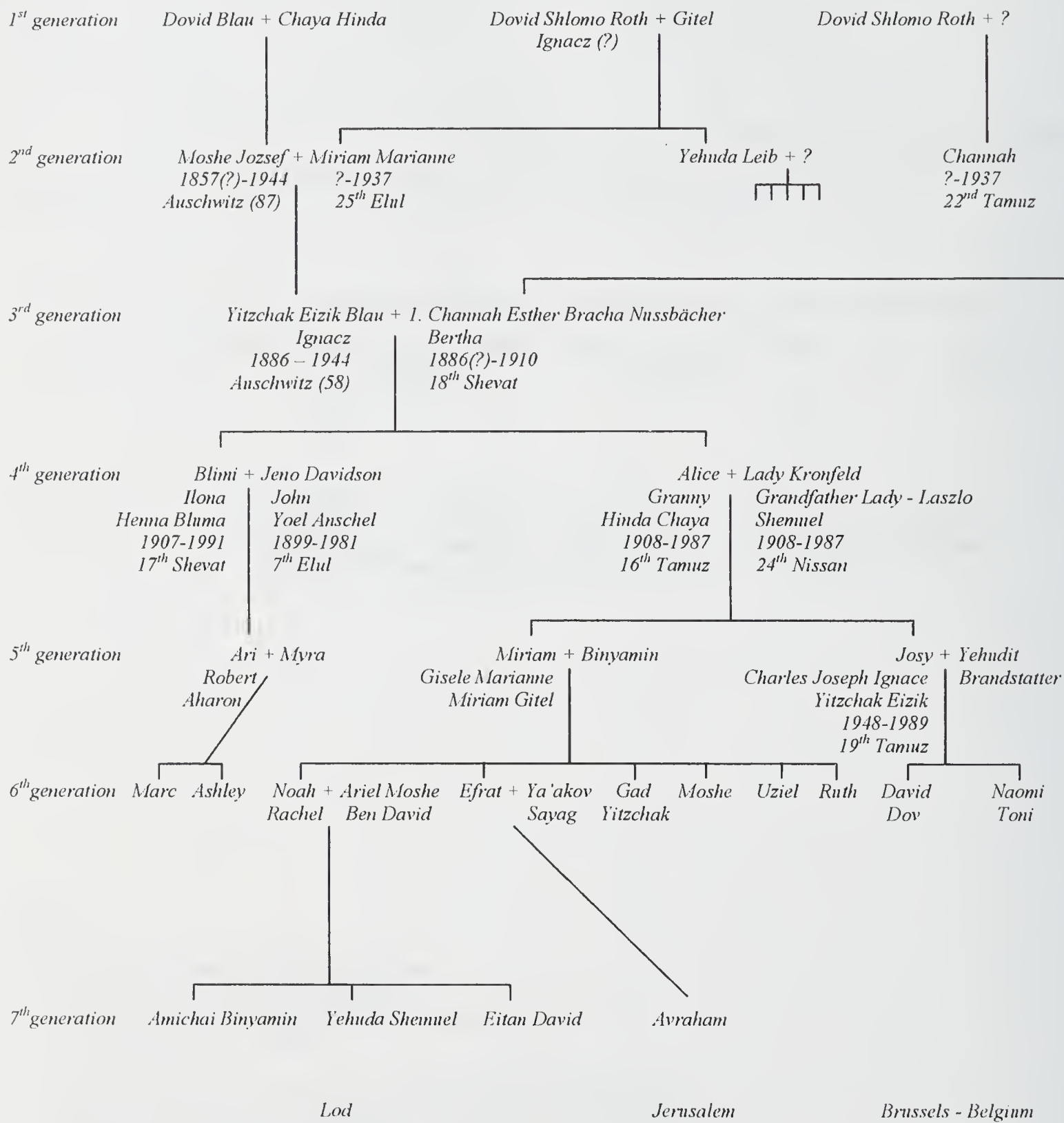
The information appears in the following order:

1. The name or the nickname of the person.
2. The Hebrew name (where different from the general name).
3. Year of birth and year of death.
4. The date of death.
5. For those murdered in the Holocaust: name of the death camp (and age).
Where these details are not available, the word “Holocaust” only appears.
6. Place of residence of the last generation.

From the third generation onwards the brothers and sisters appear in each family in order of birth: from the eldest on the left to the youngest on the right.



The branch of Yitzchak Eizik Blau



Shlomo Yitzchak Gershon + Henna Bluma
Nussbächer

Ze'ev

Aharon
1847-1905

+

Gitel Malka
?-1939
1st Av

Yitzchak Eizik Blau + 2. Leah Nussbächer

Lenke
1890(?) - 1944
Auschwitz (54)

Buki + Pierre Bekefi
Bertha 1904-1944
Esther Bracha 1912-1944
Bergen Belsen(32)

Keindi
Varvara
Breindel
1912-41
23rd Iyar

Nendi + Joseph Hirsch
Irene 1909 - 1998
Genendel 29th Nissan
1914-1990
10th Shevat

Kutti + Sima
Oscar-Osi
Jekuthiel

Dikla
Leah

Yasmin
Shoshana

Noga
Esther

Yitzchak

Jerusalem

The branch of Armin Blau

1st generation

Dovid Blau + Chaya Hinda Dovid Shlomo Roth + Gitel
Ignacz(?)

2nd generation

Moshe Jozsef + Miriam (Matel) Marianne
1857(?) - 1944 ? - 1937
Anschwitz (87) 25th Elul

3rd generation

Armin + Margit Lev
Oren Leib Matel
1894 - 1944 1902 - 1944
Anschwitz (50) Anschwitz (42)

4th generation

Irene + Karcsi Maron Lucu + Imre Hoffman Hedi
Devora Karl Yehudit Menashe Marta
1922 - 1987 22nd Shevat 1927 - 1944
Kaiserwald (17)

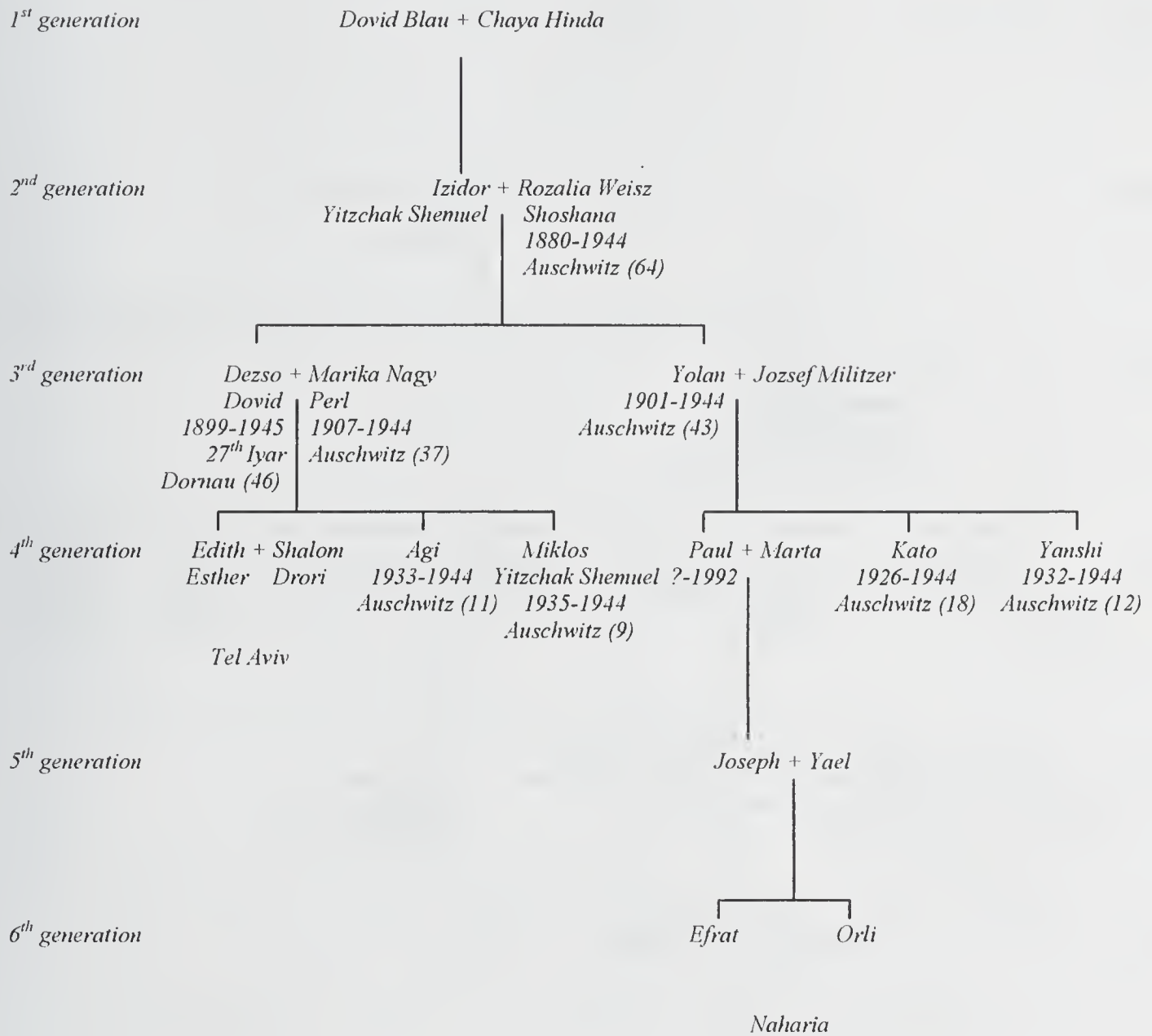
5th generation

George + Anne Giora + Daniela
Tel Aviv

6th generation

Nicole Alexander
Sydney - Australia

The branch of Izidor Blau



The branch of Arye Blau

1st generation

Dovid Blau + Chaya Hinda

2nd generation

Arye Yehuda + Beinda Leah Markovitz
?-1918(?) ?-1944
Auschwitz

3rd generation

Zsiga + Liba
Zsigmond Louiza
Meshulam Ahuva
1895-1944 1902-1944
Auschwitz (49) Auschwitz (42)

4th generation

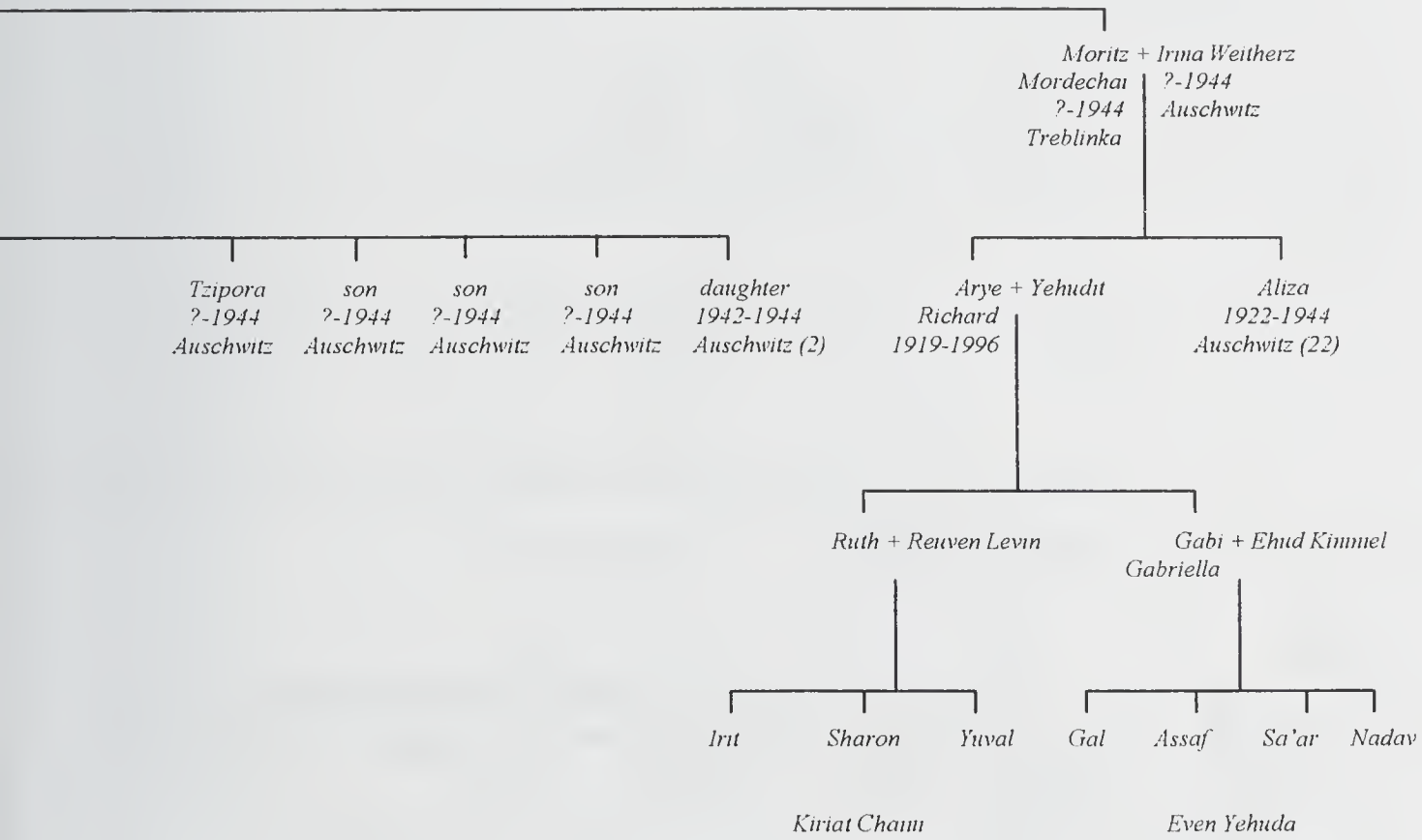
Ika + Ya'akov Goldfarb Jeno + Jenne Hirsch Chaya Rachel + Dov Schechter Arye Leib Mordechai
Rivka Yitzhak Zissa Helen ?-1944 ?-1944
1920-1944 Shemuel 1922- 1924- Auschwitz Auschwitz
Auschwitz (24)

5th generation

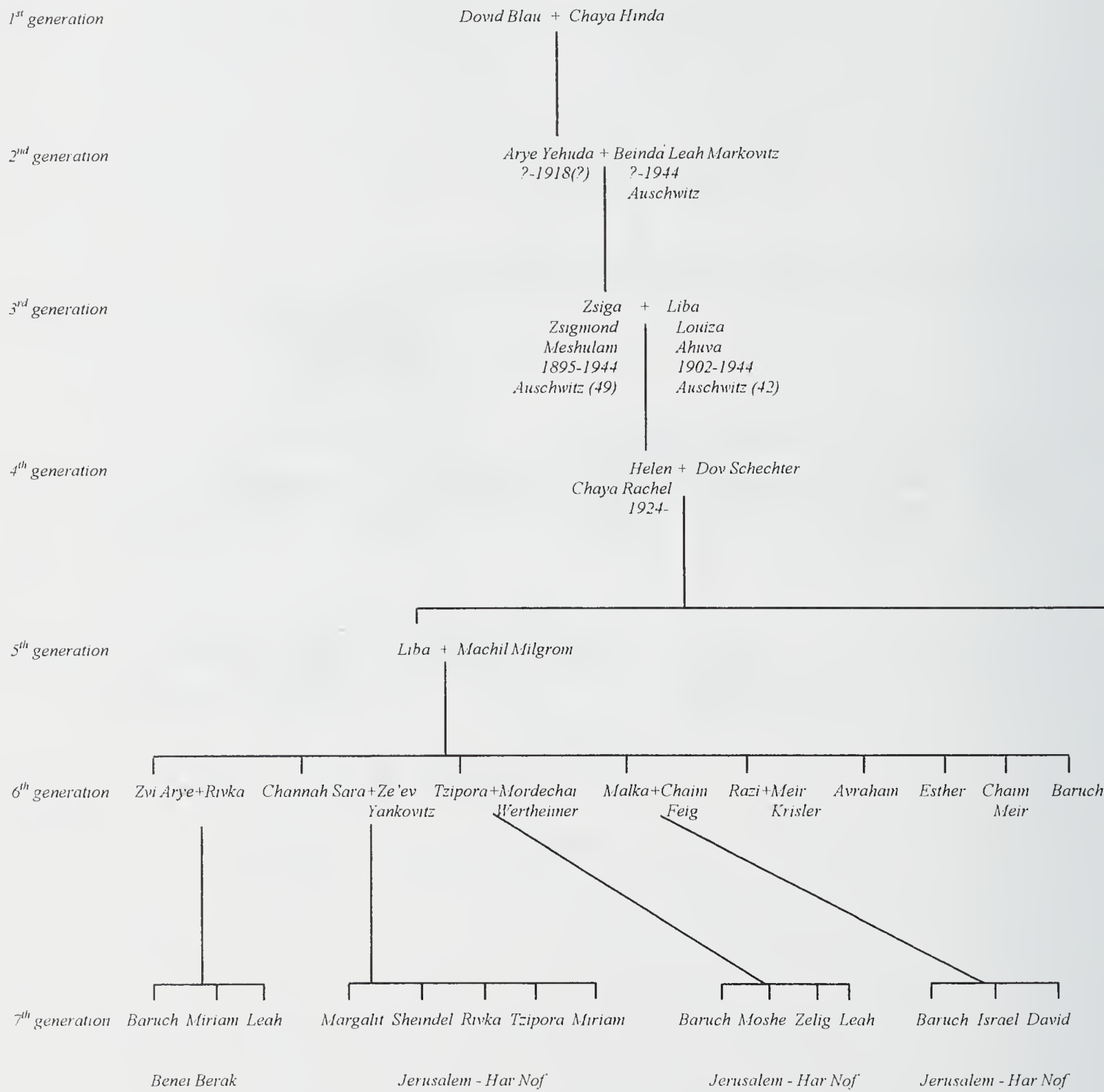
son son daughter Rivka + Joseph Meshulam descendants
1940-1944 ?-1944 ?-1944 Rachel Levkovitz see branch of
Auschwitz (3.5) Auschwitz Auschwitz Chaya Blau-Schechter
USA p. 140

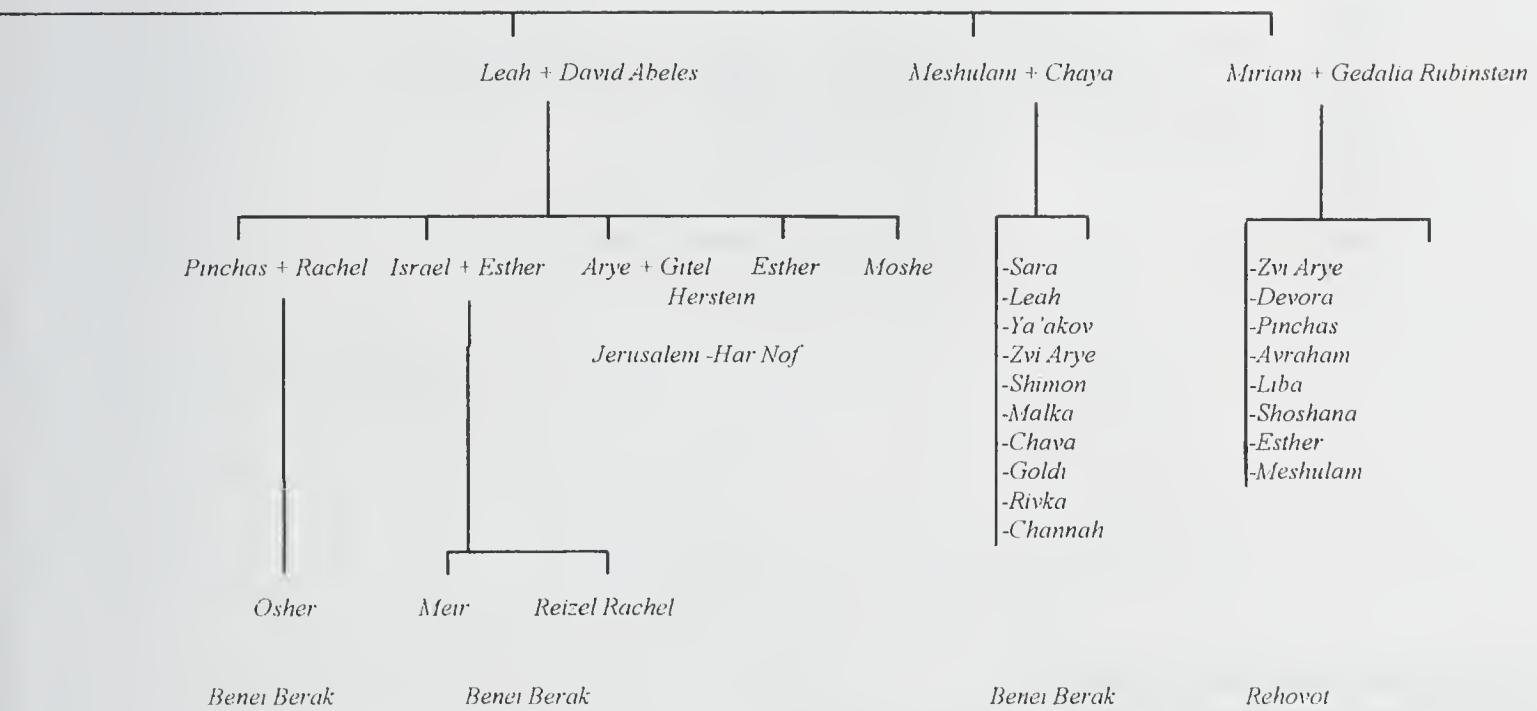
6th generation

Yeshaya ? Yehuda
USA

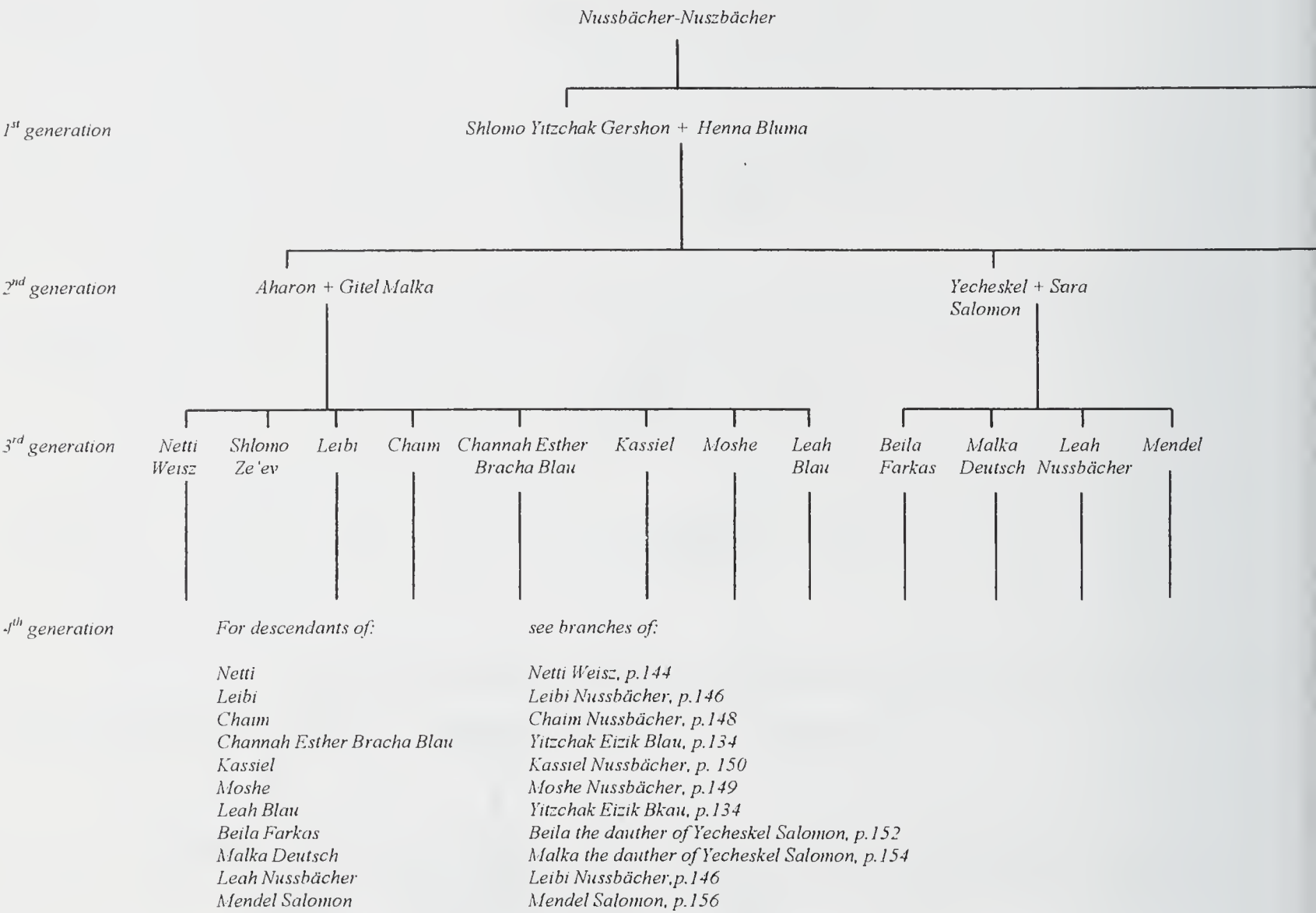


The branch of Chaya Blau-Schechter





The Nussbächer family tree

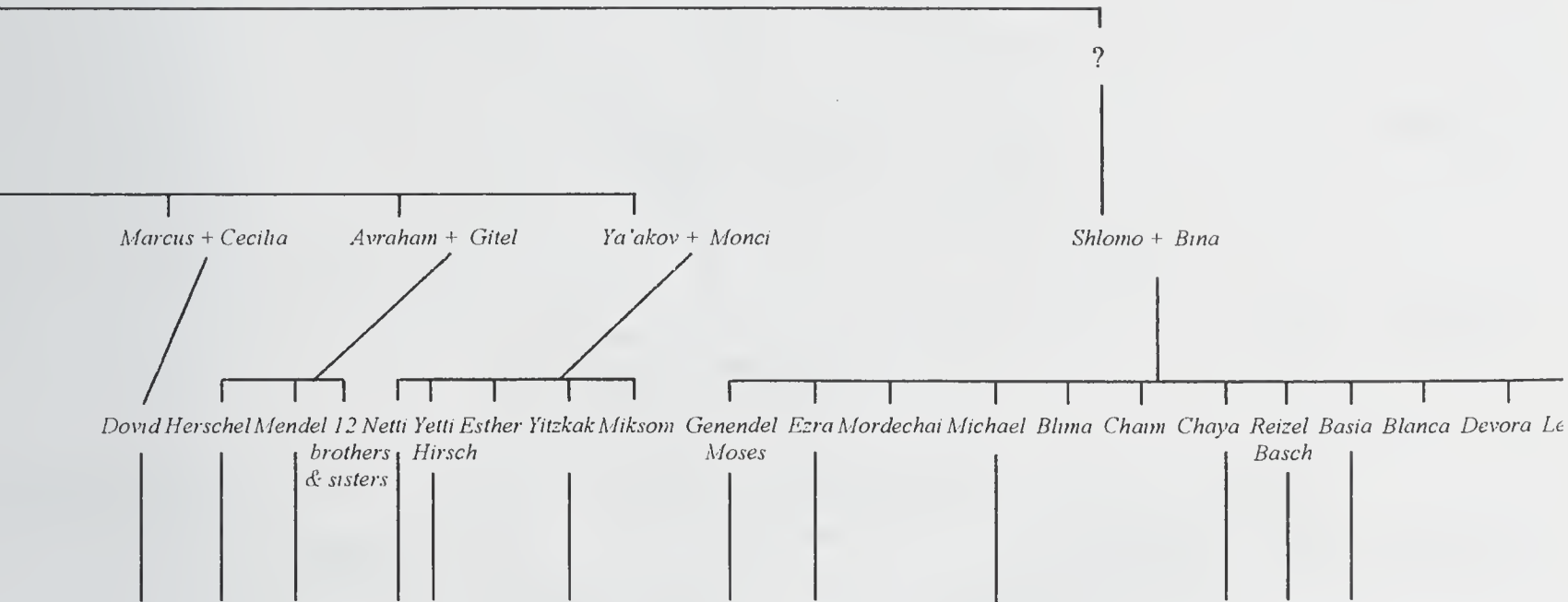


Legend

The information appears in the following order:

1. The name or nickname of the person.
2. The Hebrew name (where different from the general name).
3. Year of birth and year of death
4. The date of death.
5. For those murdered in the Holocaust: name of death camp (and age).
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6. Place of residence of the last generation.

From the third generation onwards the brothers and sisters appear in each family in order of birth: from the eldest on the left to the youngest on the right.



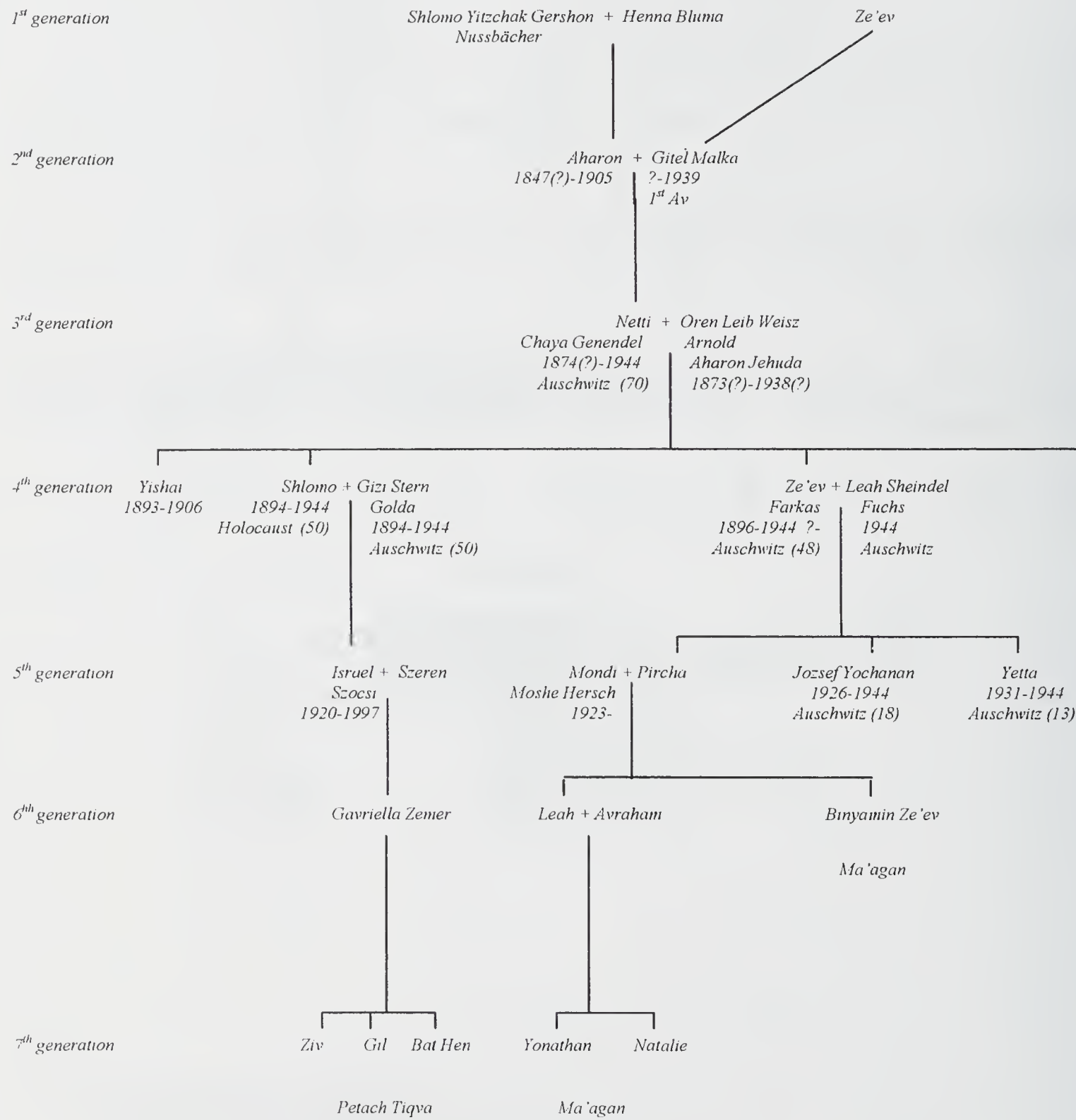
For descendants of:

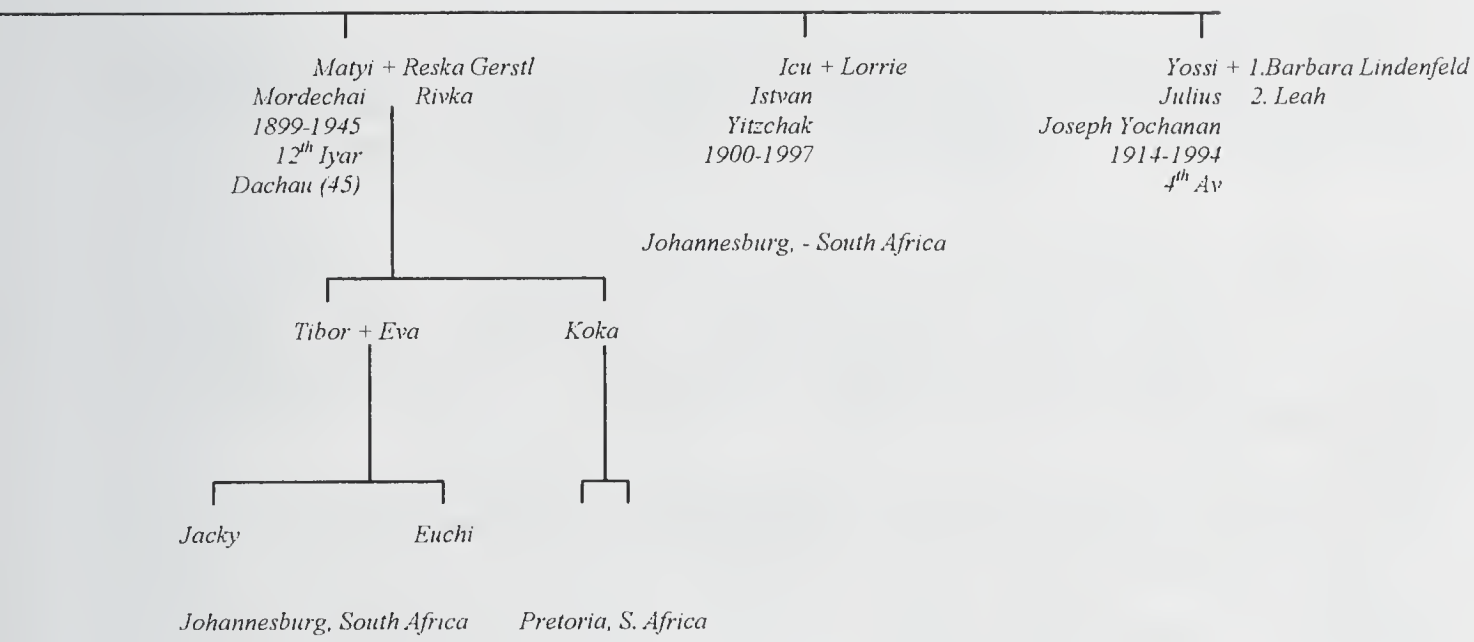
Dovid
 Herschel and Mendel
 Netti, Yetti Hirsch and Yitzhak
 Genendel, Ezra, Michael, Chaya, Basia
 Reizel

see branches of:

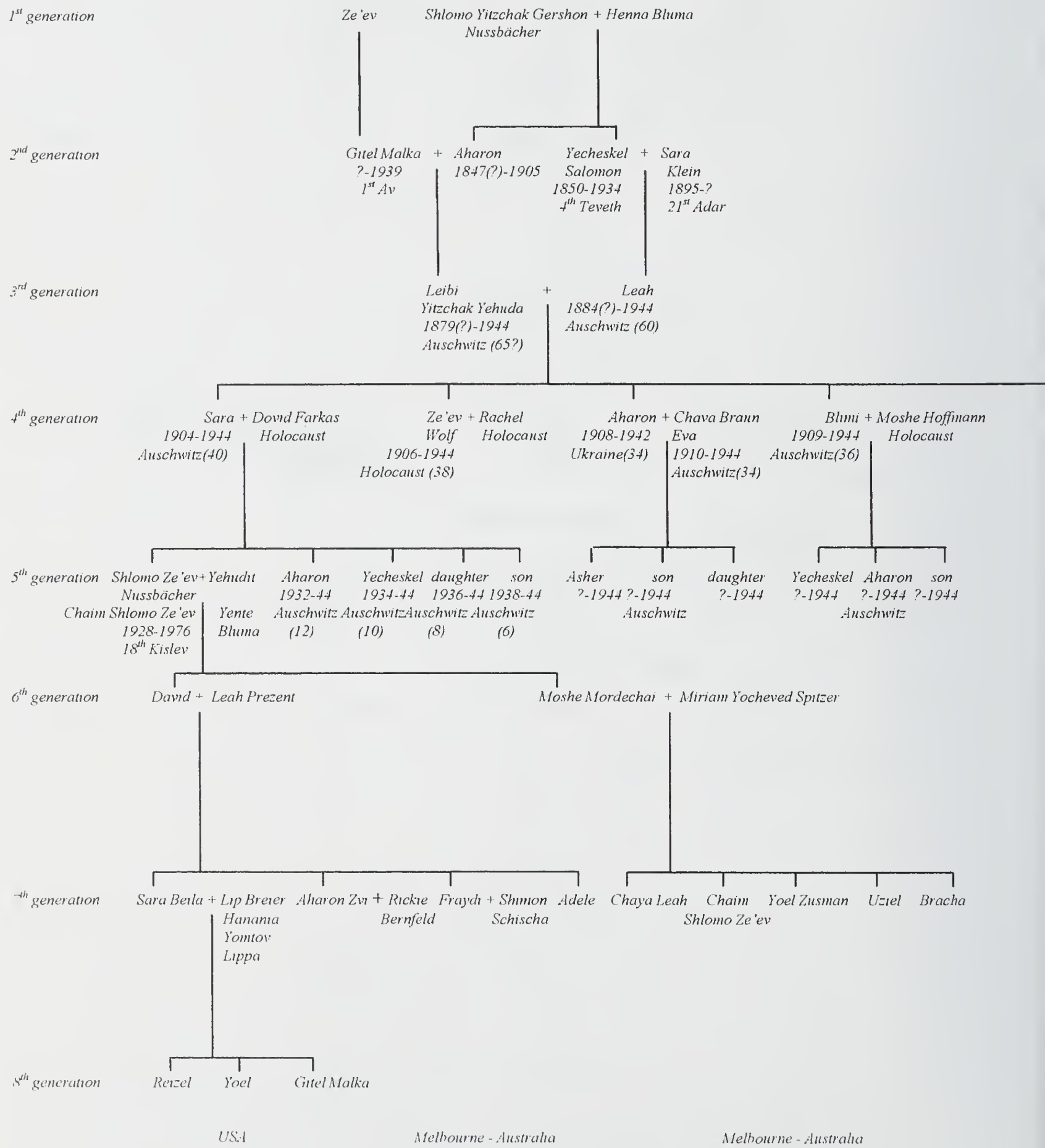
Marcus Nussbächer, p.158
 Avraham and Gitel Nussbächer, p.160
 Ya'akov Nussbächer, p.163
 Shlomo Nussbächer, p.164
 Reizel daughter of Shlomo Nussbächer, p.166

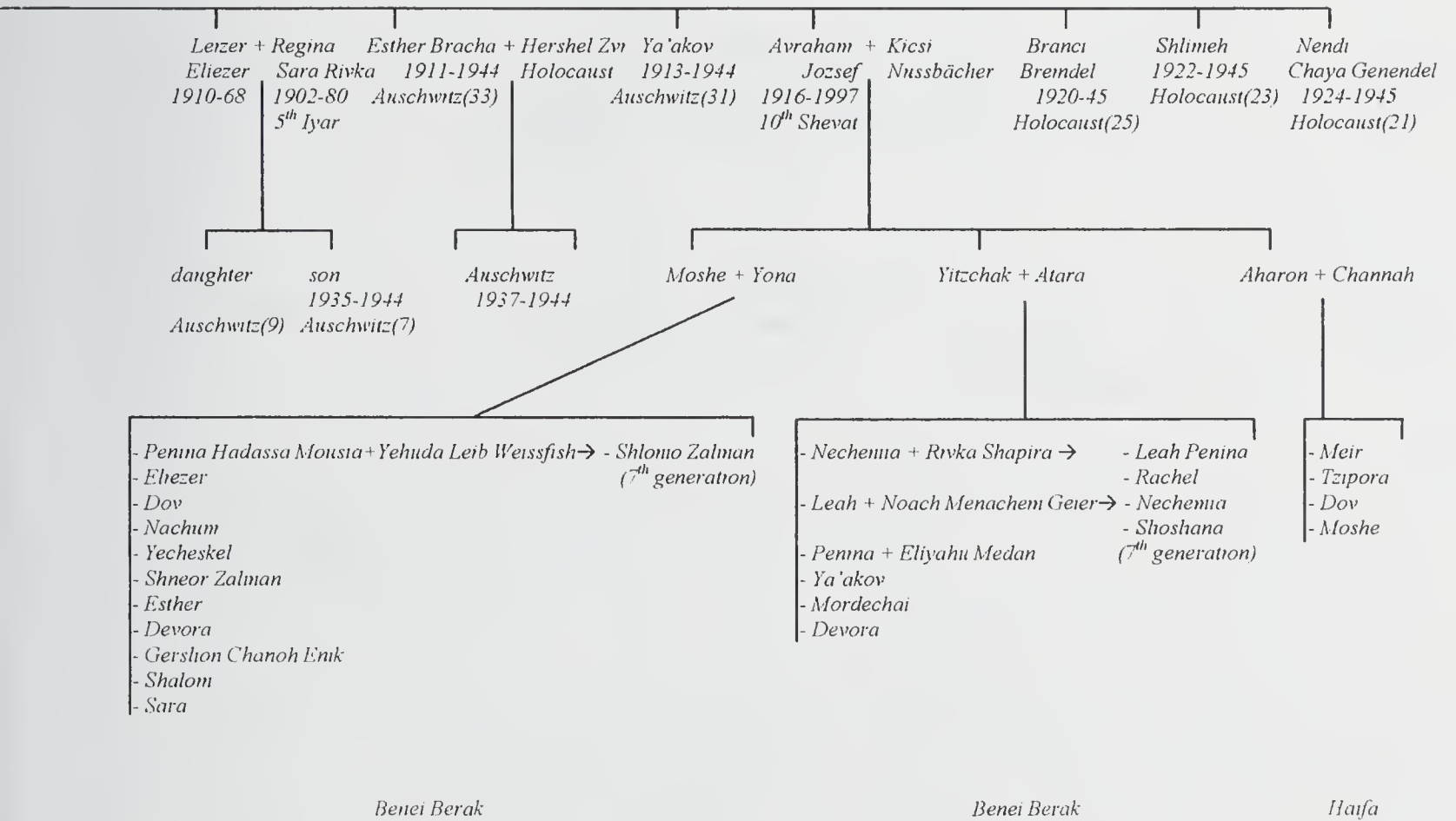
Branch of Netti Weisz



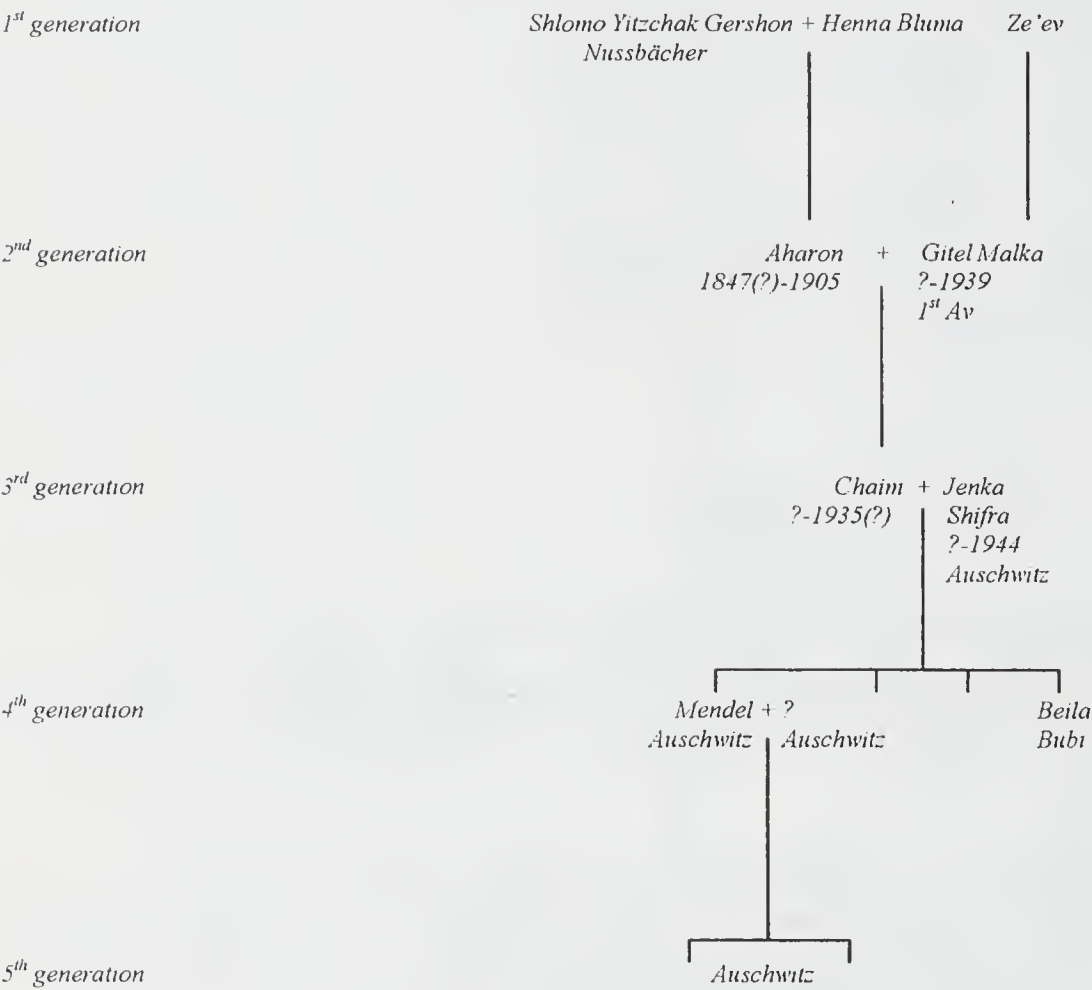


The branch of Leibi Nussbächer

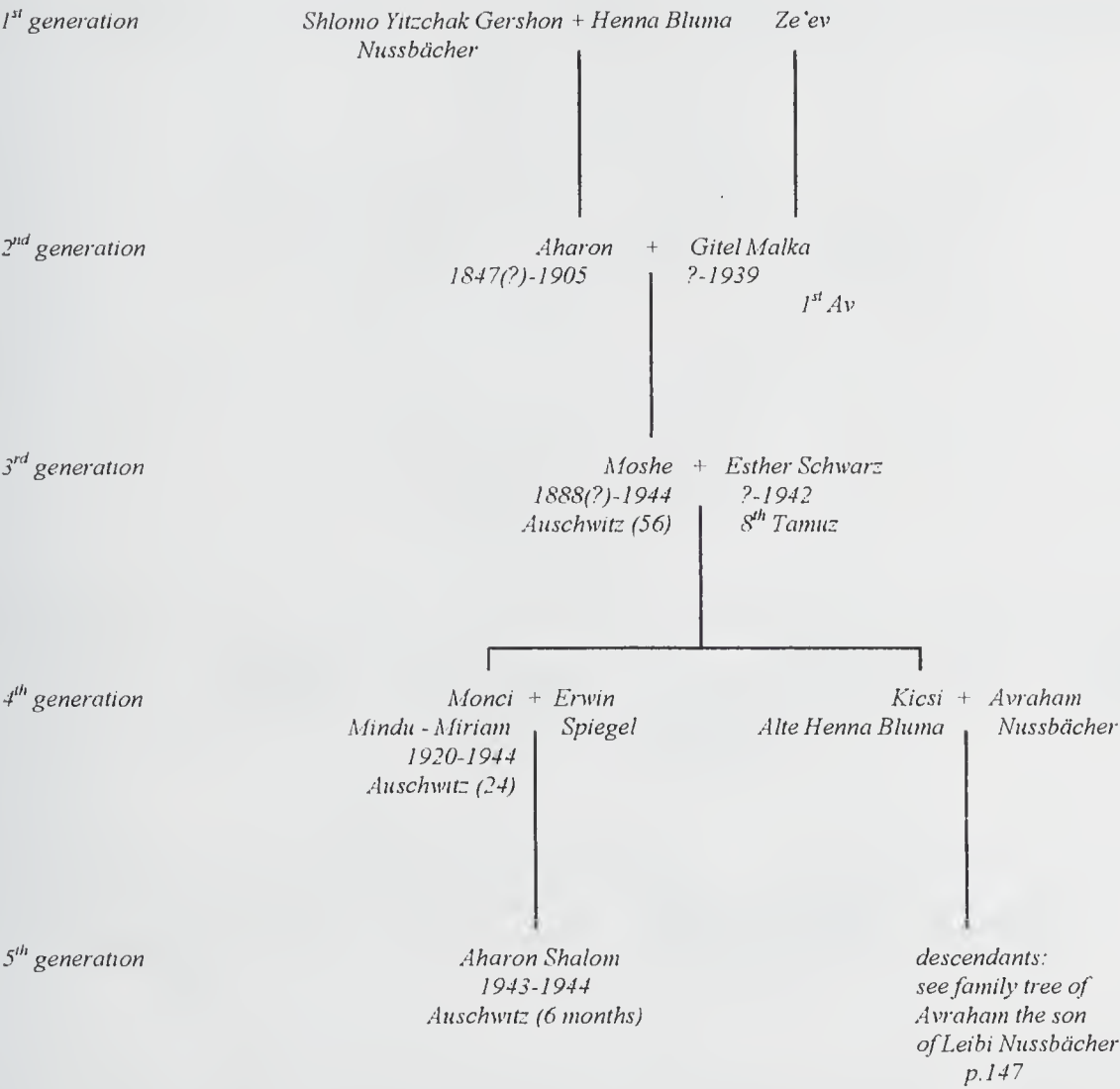




The branch of Chaim Nussbächer



The branch of Moshe Nussbächer



The branch of Kassiel Nussbächer

1st generation

2nd generation

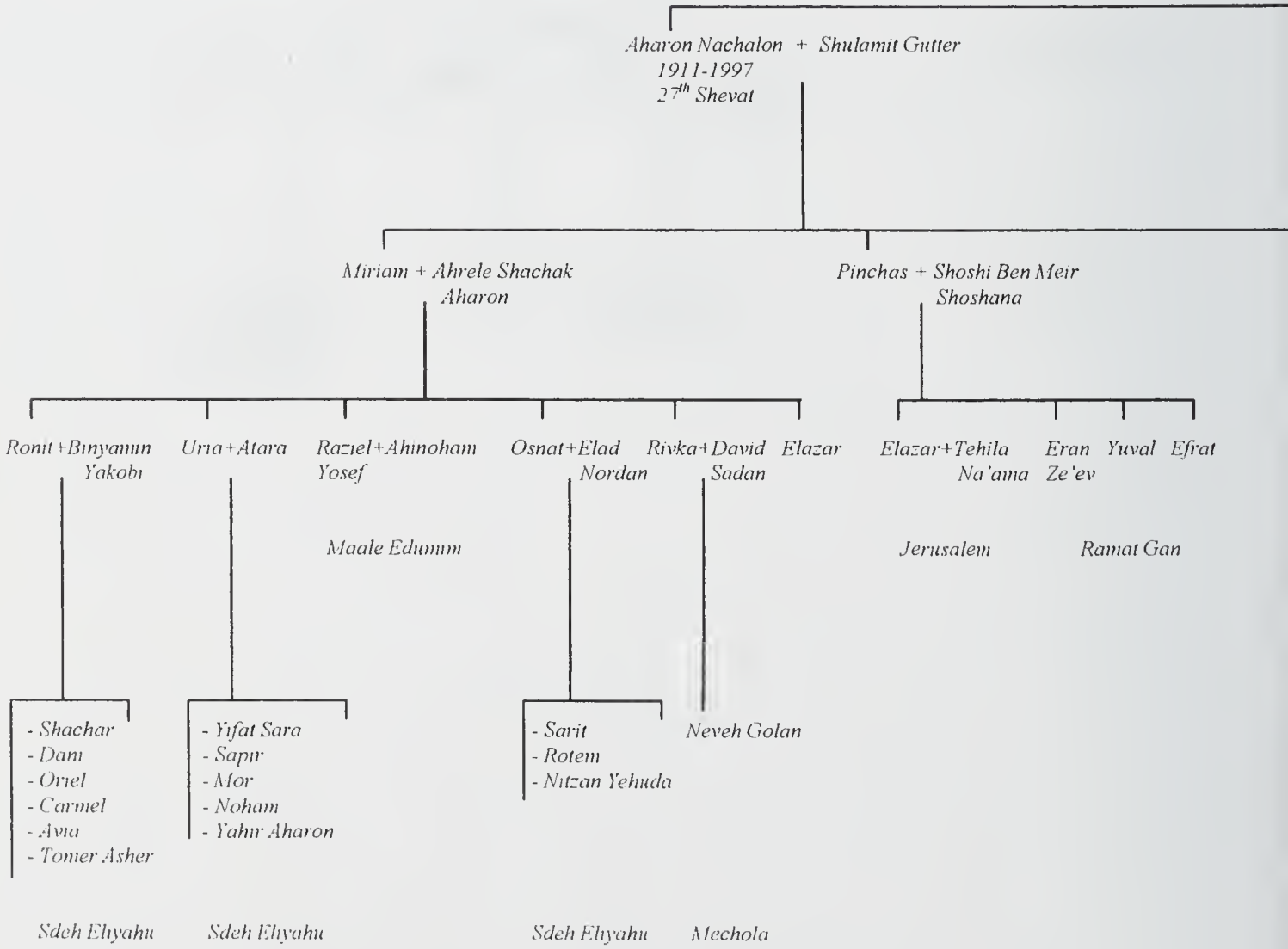
3rd generation

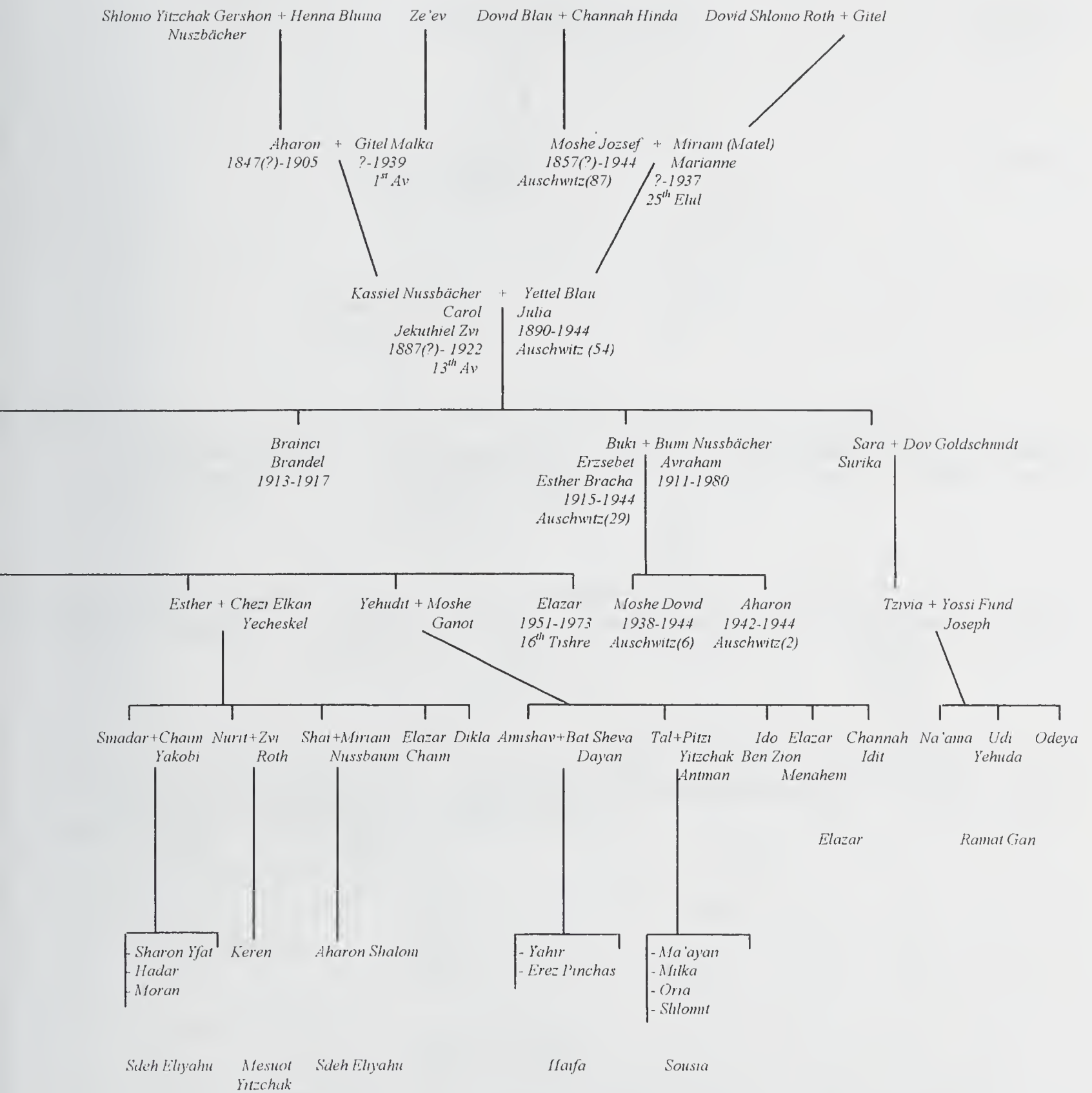
4th generation

5th generation

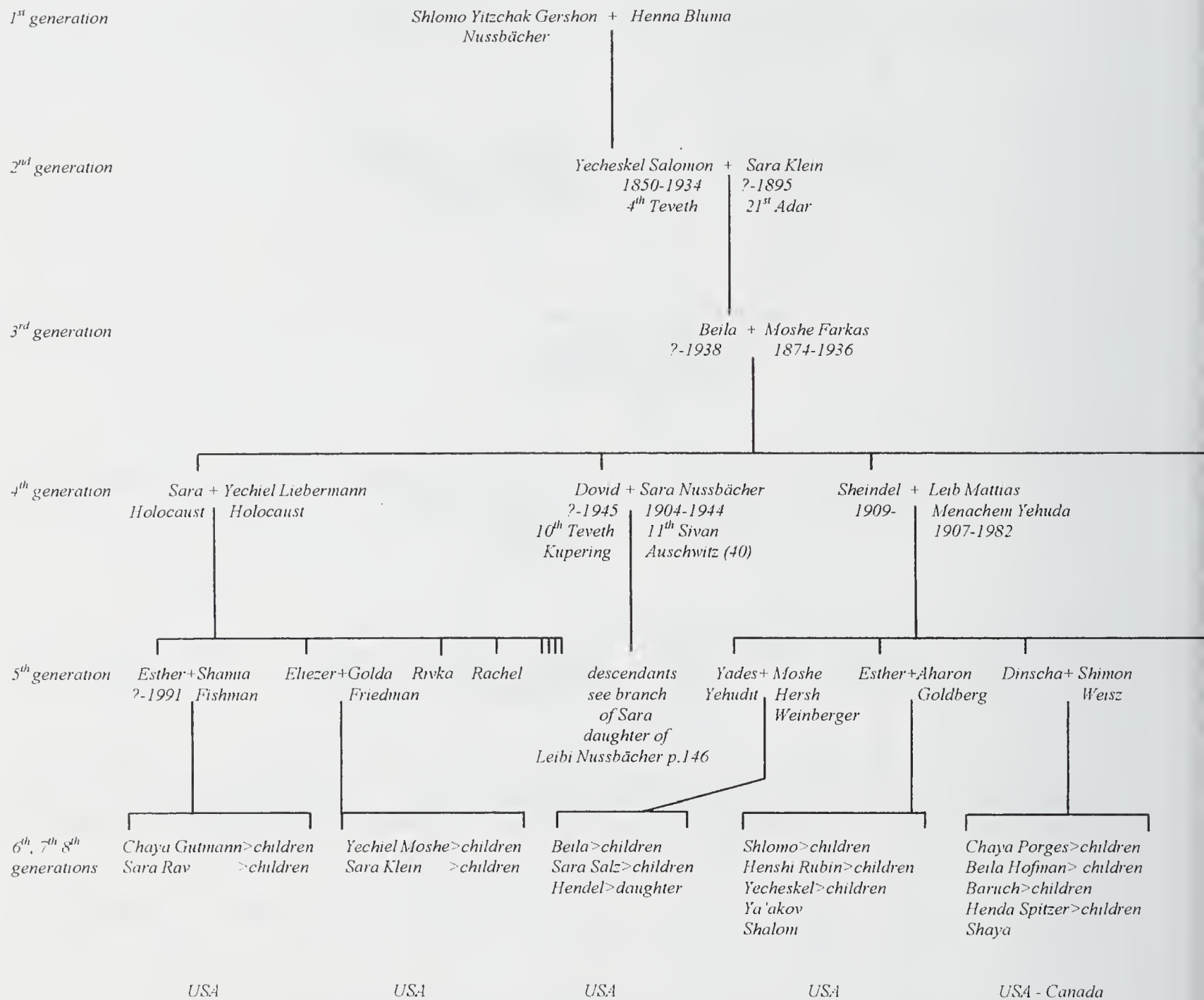
6th generation

7th generation

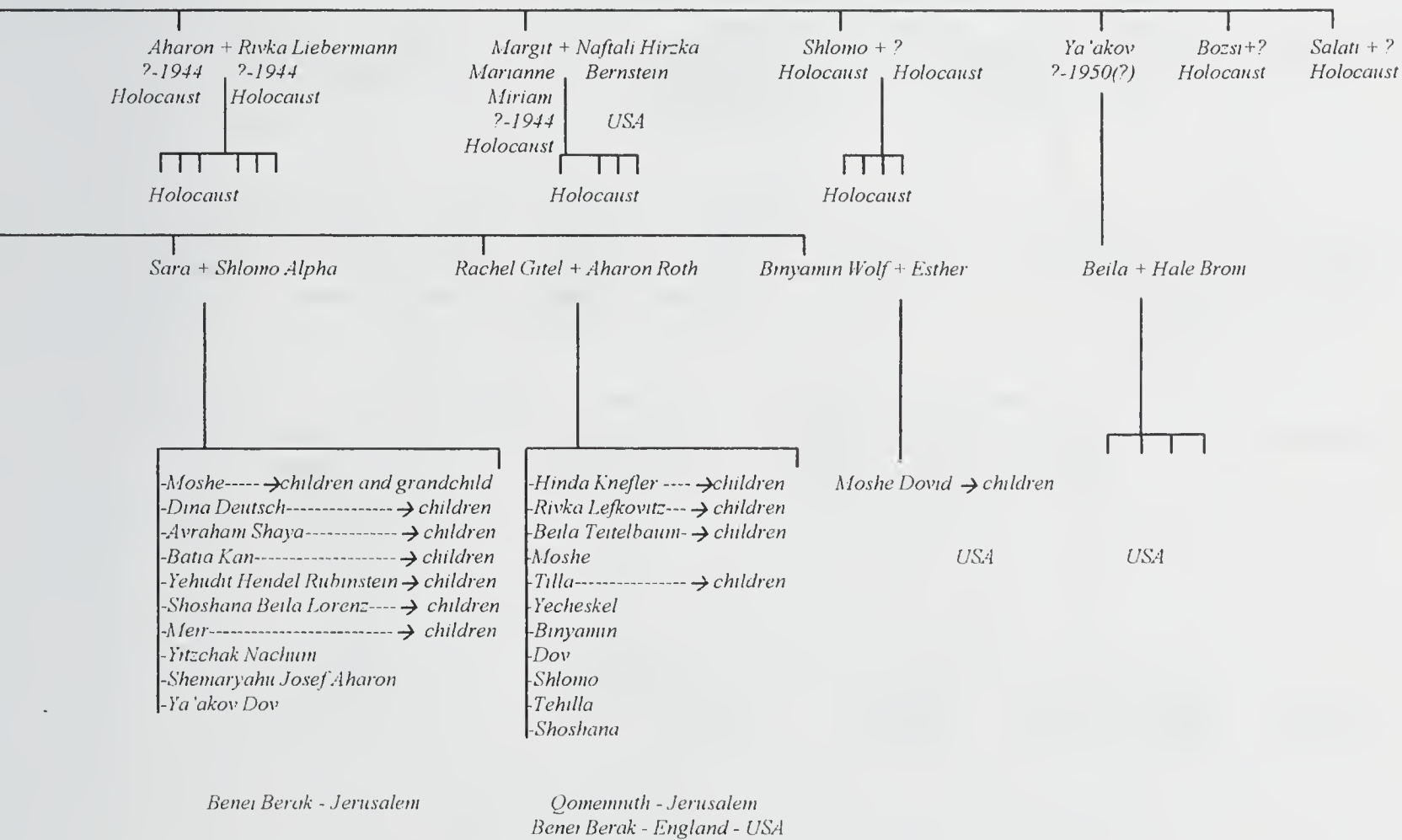




The branch of Beila the daughter of Yecheskel Salomon



Note: for obvious technical reasons, the names of the 6th generation (as far as they are known) are indicated without the name of the spouses; the 7th and 8th generations are indicated without any details.



The branch of Malka the daughter of Yecheskel Salomon

1st generation

Shlomo Yitzchak Gershon + Henna Bluma
Nussbacher

2nd generation

Yechezkel Salomon + Sara Klein
1850-1934 ?-1895
4th Tevet 21st Adar

3rd generation

Malka + Elimelech Deutsch
?-1932 ?-1938

4th generation

Shlomo + Frieda Bolan Sara + Zvi Ovits Aharon + Yolanda Nasch
?-1944 ?-1944 ?-1936 Herman 1907-1986 1907-1981
Auschwitz Auschwitz 8th Shevat ?-1958 24th Adar

5th generation

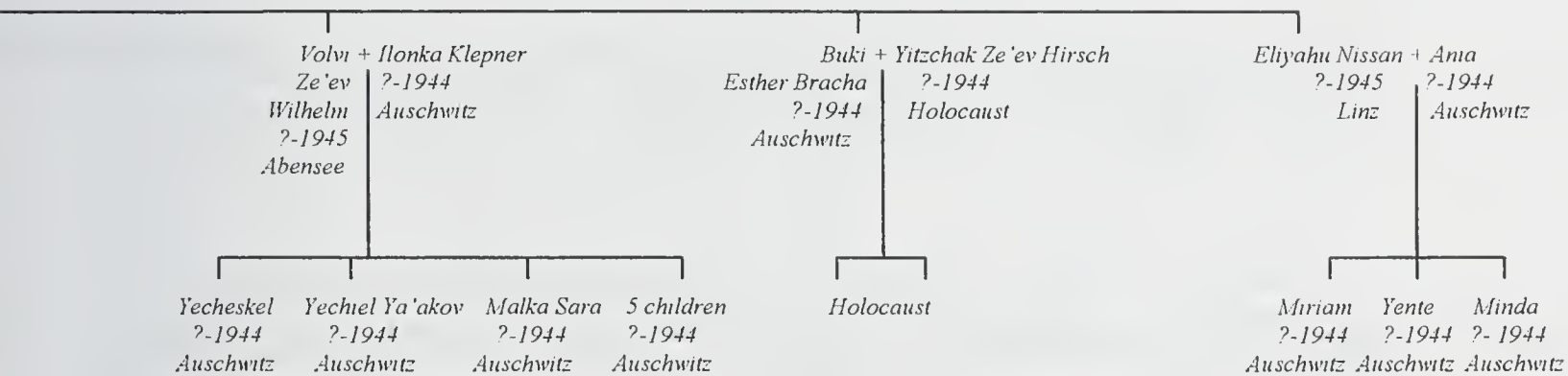
Auschwitz Zalman + Paula Tovi + Willy Malka Yehudit + Shimon Elimelech + Ilana
1926- Irene Stark ?-1944 1932- 1947-
USA Auschwitz

6th generation

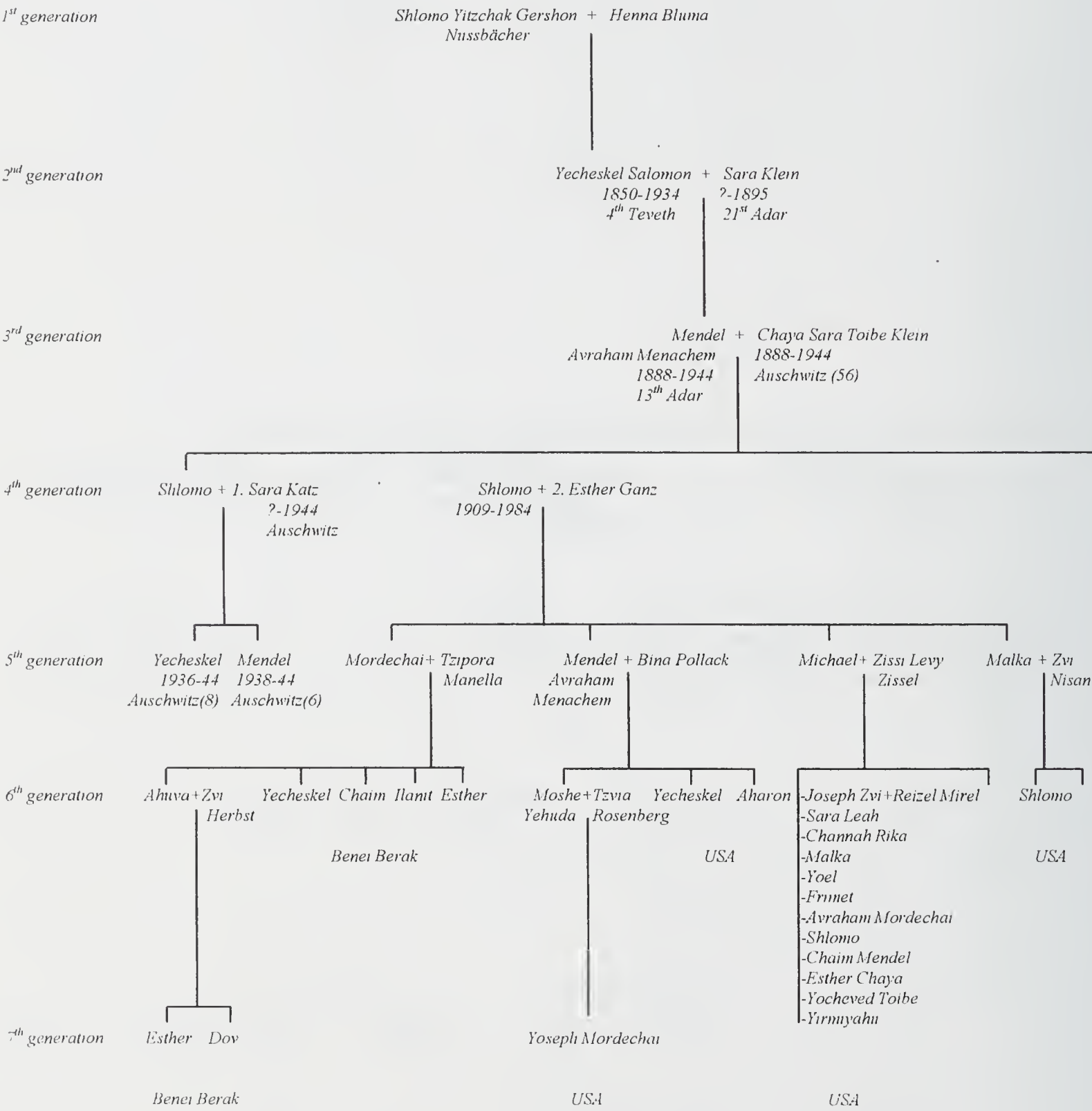
Zvi Herschl Moshe Shalom Sara Esther Naomi + Zvi Carmella + Danny Roni Dani
Charlie Steven Eve Senderovitz Kokosh Jerusalem
1959- 1964- 1967- USA

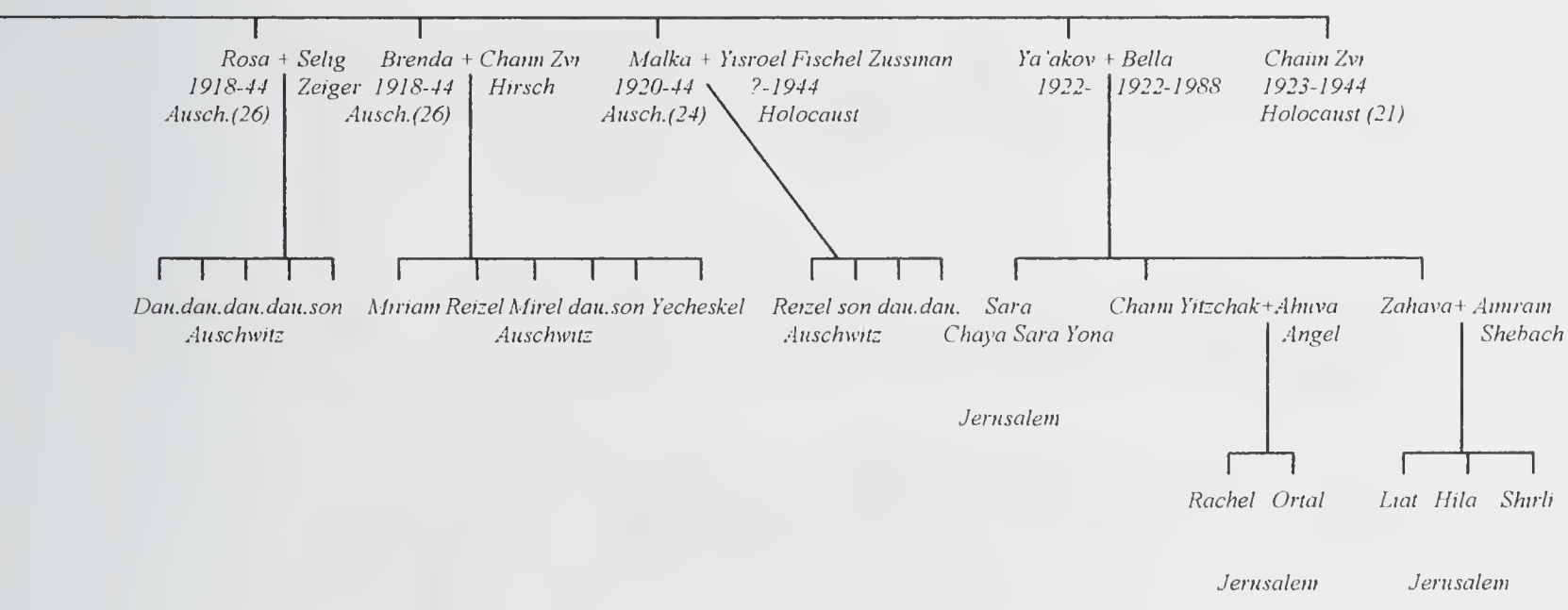
7th generation

Sheindel Malka Sara Esther Bracha Keren Lior Maya Yuval Doron
Elizabeth Gabriella Alexandra USA Jerusalem Jerusalem

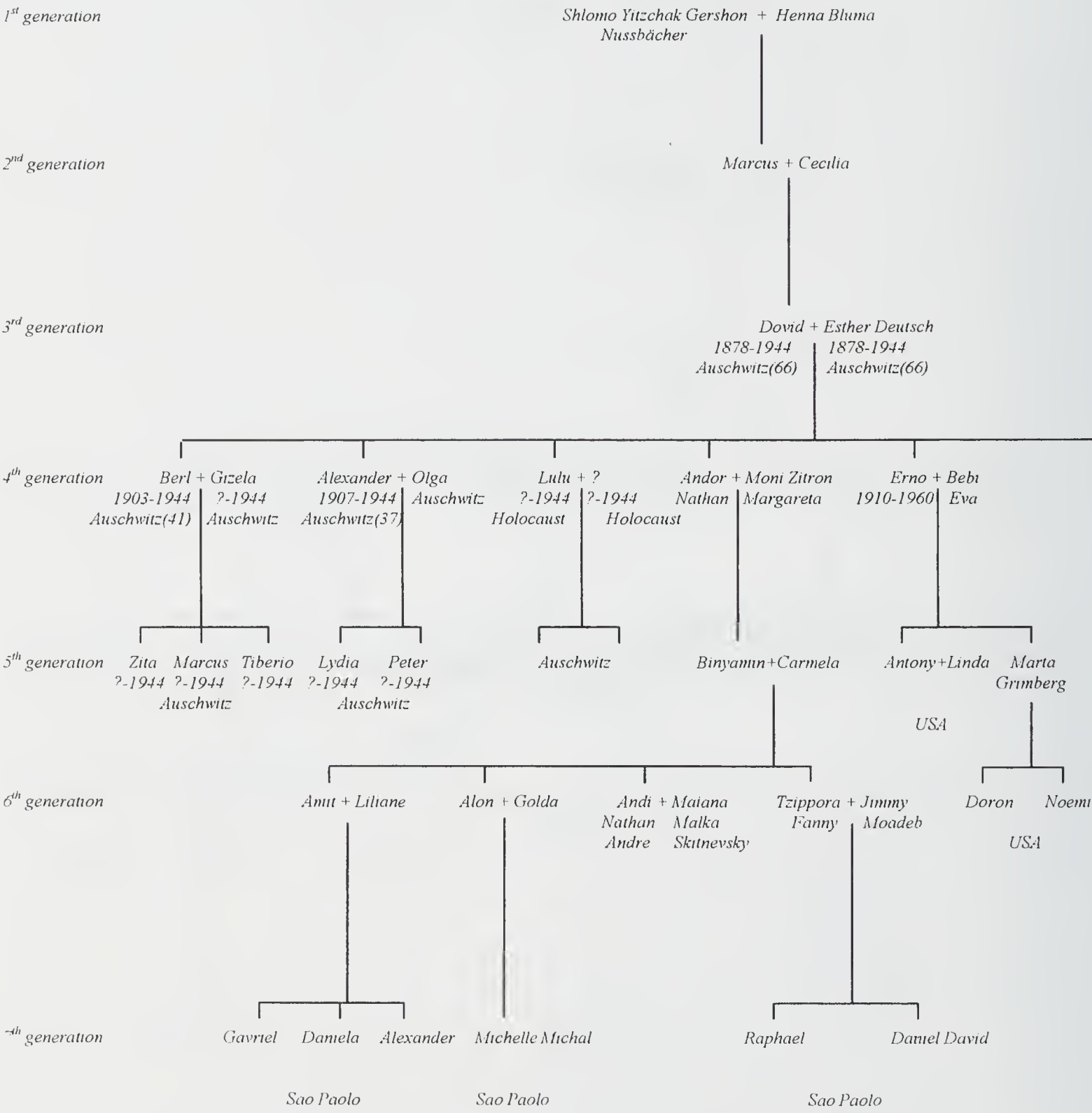


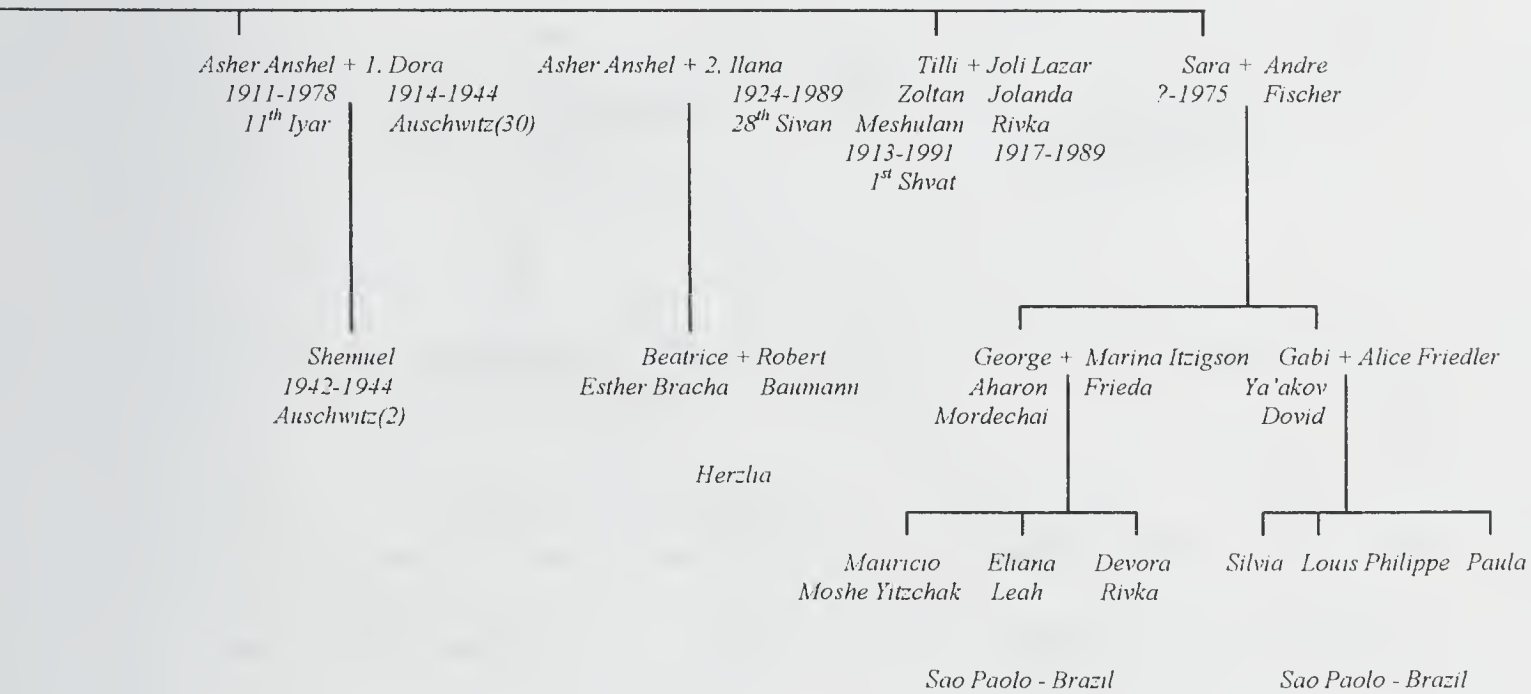
The branch of Mendel the son of Yecheskel Salomon





The branch of Marcus Nussbächer





The branch of Avraham and Gitel Nussbächer

1st generation

Shlomo Yitzchak Gershon + Henna Bluma
Nussbächer

2nd generation

Avraham + Gitel

3rd generation

Hershel + 1. Golda
Herman 1891-1919

Hershel + 2. Elisabeth Alice
Herman 1889-1944 1902-1944
Auschwitz(55) Auschwitz(42)

4th generation

Babi + 1. Yoshke
Barbara Pollack
Blini 1914-1943
Ukraine(29)

Babi + 2. Dovid
Herschkovitz

Alexander + Sonia
Avraham Shlomo Salika

Gitel + Max
Cohen

5th generation

Miriam + Shemuel Shalev

Elsabeth + Ezra
Noema

Arik + Gizelle
Hershel

Gabi + Dina

Ivan + Rachel

6th generation

Lital Yuval

Salman Avshalom Bella

Maia Chaim Shani

Gai Shai Sivan Achiaz

Sara David

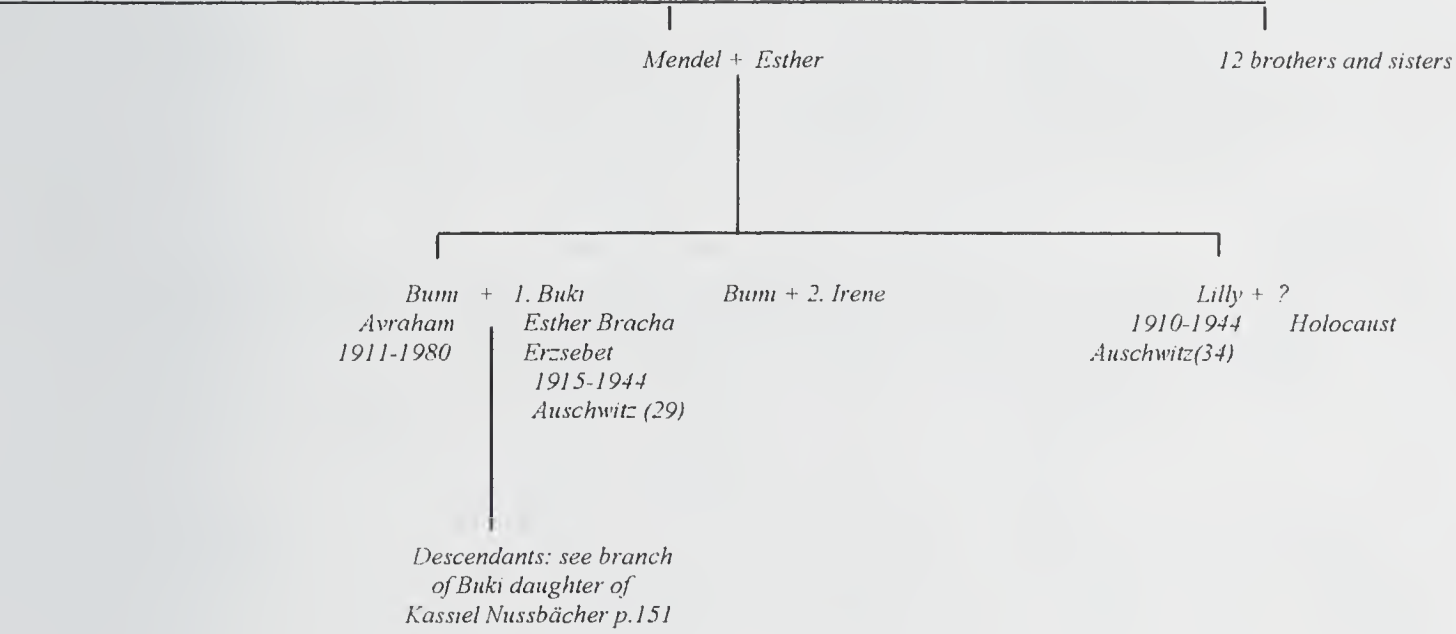
Ra'anana

Jerusalem

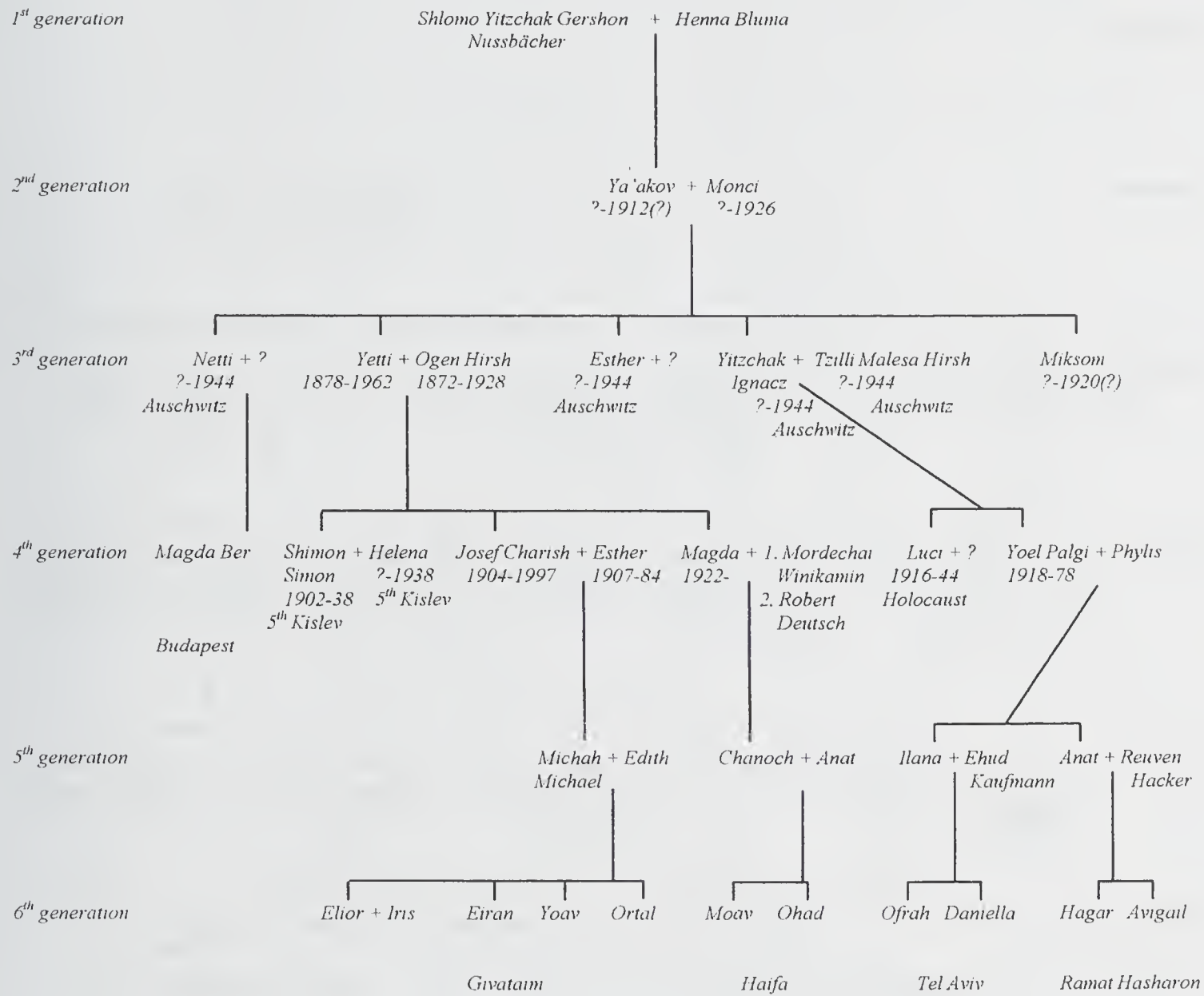
Carmiel

Jerusalem

Haifa



The branch of Ya'akov Nussbächer



The branch of Shlomo Nussbächer

1st generation

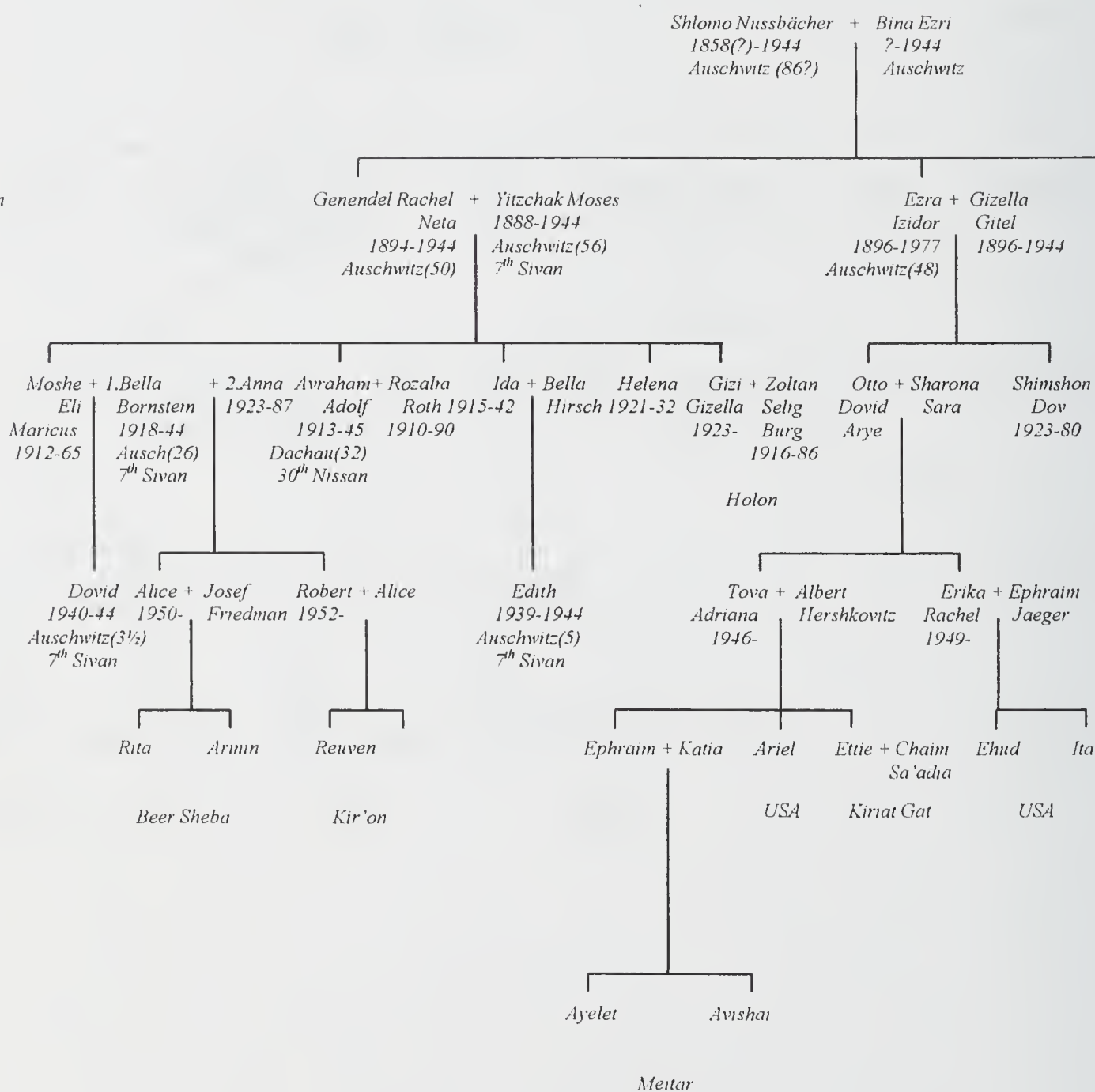
2nd generation

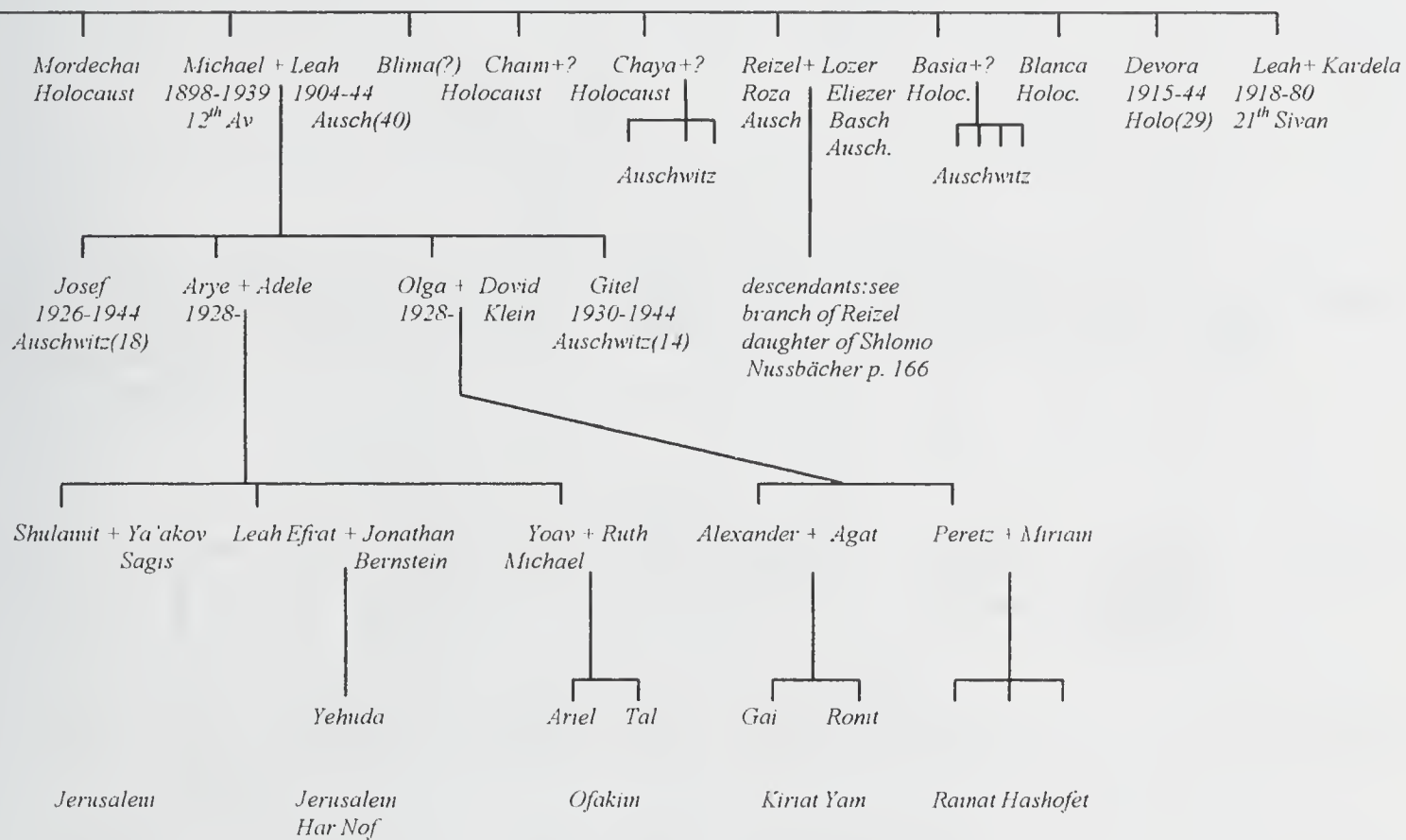
3rd generation

4th generation

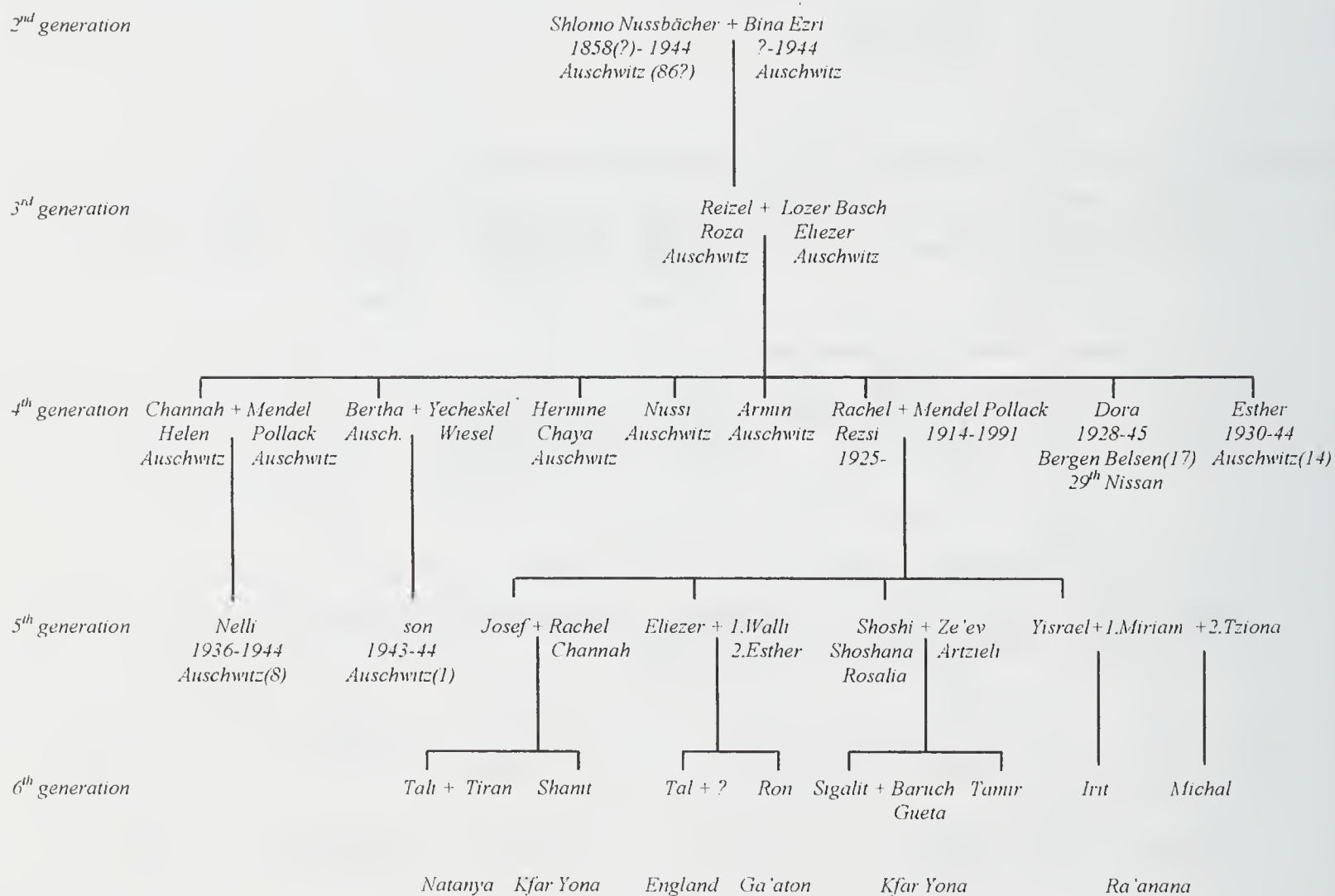
5th generation

6th generation

 π^{th} generation



The branch of Reizel the daughter of Shlomo Nussbächer



List of Relatives Murdered in the Holocaust

List of Granny's relatives

who were murdered in the Holocaust⁽¹⁾

Name	Parents' names	Age	Place of Residence	Death Camp
Family Blau				
Moshe Jozsef Blau	Dovid - Chaya Hinda	87	Cehul Silvaniei	Auschwitz
Yitzchak Eizik Blau	Moshe Jozsef - Miriam	58	Cehul Silvaniei	Auschwitz
Leah Blau	Aharon - Gitel Malka	54	Cehul Silvaniei	Auschwitz
Esther Bracha Bekefi	Yitzchak Eizik - Leah	32	Brussels	Bergen Belsen
Pierre Bekefi	Leizer - Franciska	40	Brussels	Bergen Belsen
Oren Leib Blau	Moshe Jozsef - Miriam	50	Cehul Silvaniei	Auschwitz
Matel Blau	?	42	Cehul Silvaniei	Auschwitz
Hinda Blau	Oren Leib - Matel	17	Cehul Silvaniei	Kaiserwald
The family of Netti (Chaya Genendel) Nussbacher-Weisz				
Chaya Genendel Weisz	Aharon - Gitel Malka	70	Simleul Silvaniei	Auschwitz
Shlomo Weisz	Oren Leib - Chaya Genendel	50	Simleul Silvaniei	?
Golda Weisz	?	50	Simleul Silvaniei	Auschwitz
Ze'ev Weisz	Oren Leib - Chaya Genendel	48	Oradea	Auschwitz
Leah Sheindel Weisz	Binyamin - ?	?	Oradea	Auschwitz
Jozsef Yochanan Weisz	Ze'ev - Leah Sheindel	18	Oradea	Auschwitz
Yetta Weisz	Ze'ev - Leah Sheindel	13	Oradea	Auschwitz
Mordechai Weisz	Oren Leib - Chaya Genendel	45	Ungvar	Dachau
The family of Leibi (Yitzchak Yehuda) Nussbacher				
Yitzchak Yehuda Nussb.	Aharon - Gitel Malka	65	Nasaud	Auschwitz
Leah Nussbacher	Yecheskel - Sara	60	Nasaud	Auschwitz
Sara Farkas	Yitzchak Yehuda - Leah	40	Somcuta Mare	Auschwitz
Dovid Farkas	Moshe - Beila	?	Somcuta Mare	Kupering
Aharon Farkas	Dovid - Sara	12	Somcuta Mare	Auschwitz
Yecheskel Farkas	Dovid - Sara	10	Somcuta Mare	Auschwitz
Yehudit Farkas	Dovid - Sara	8	Somcuta Mare	Auschwitz
Ze'ev Nussbacher	Yitzchak Yehuda - Leah	38	Nasaud	Auschwitz
Rachel Nussbacher	?	?	Nasaud	Auschwitz
Aharon Nussbacher	Yitzchak Yehuda - Leah	34	Somcuta Mare	Ukraine
Chava Nussbacher	Jozsef Asher - Perl	34	Somcuta Mare	Auschwitz
Asher Nussbacher	Aharon - Chava	?	Somcuta Mare	Auschwitz
Blini Hofmann	Yitzchak Yehuda - Leah	35	Marghita	Auschwitz
Moshe Hofmann	?	?	Marghita	?
Yecheskel Hofmann	Moshe - Blimi	?	Marghita	Auschwitz
Aharon Hofmann	Moshe - Blimi	?	Marghita	Auschwitz
Esther Bracha Nussb.	Yitzchak Yehuda - Leah	33	Poiana	Auschwitz
Ya'akov Nussbacher	Yitzchak Yehuda - Leah	31	Nasaud	Auschwitz
Breindel Nussbacher	Yitzchak Yehuda - Leah	25	Nasaud	?
Shlomeh Nussbacher	Yitzchak Yehuda - Leah	23	Nasaud	?
Chaya Genendel Nussb.	Yitzchak Yehuda - Leah	21	Nasaud	?
The family of Chaim Nussbacher				
Mendel Nussbacher	Chaim - Shifra	?	Cluj	Auschwitz

Name	Parents' names	Age	Place of Residence	Death Camp
The family of Kassiel Nussbacher				
Yettel Nussbacher	Moshe Jozsef - Miriam	54	Negresti	Auschwitz
Esther Bracha Nussb.	Jekuthiel Zvi - Yettel	29	Negresti	Auschwitz
Moshe Dovid Nussbacher	Avraham - Esther Bracha	6	Negresti	Auschwitz
Aharon Nussbacher	Avraham - Esther Bracha	2	Negresti	Auschwitz

The family of Moshe Nussbacher

Moshe Nussbacher	Aharon - Gitel Malka	56	Seini	Auschwitz
Miriam Spiegel	Moshe - Esther	24	Seini	Auschwitz
Aharon Shalom Spiegel	Erwin - Miriam	1/2	Seini	Auschwitz

(1) The list includes the descendants of Granny's grandfathers (Grandfather Jozsef Blau and Grandfather Aharon Nussbacher) and their spouses, in cases where their first names were known.

**List of Grandfather Lady’s relatives
who were murdered in the Holocaust⁽²⁾**

Name	Parents' names	Place of Residence	Death Camp
Anna Hollander	Dovid - Sara	Ozd	Auschwitz
Sandor Hollander	?	Ozd	Auschwitz
Armin Szenczer	Dovid - Sara	Szepsi	Auschwitz
Yolan Szenczer	?	Szepsi	Auschwitz
Laszlo Szenczer	Armin - Yolan	Szepsi	?
Jozsef Szenczer	Dovid - Sara	Szepsi	Auschwitz
Boske Szenczer	?	Szepsi	Auschwitz

(2) The list includes the descendants of Family Szenczer and their spouses, in cases where their first names were known. I do not possess a list of members of the Kronfeld family who perished.

List of Family documents in the hebrew edition

Page (in hebrew ed.)	Titles of the facsimiles
274	Marriage certificate of Samuel Kronfeld and Leni Horowitz The marriage certificate is an official document, written in 1925 and based on the 86-year-old <i>Ketuba</i> [Jewish marriage contract] (Until 1847 there were no marriage registrations). The document says: Samuel, born in 1811 in Korlat; Leni, born in Inancs; the marriage ceremony was performed in Korlat in 1836, by Rabbi Samuel Rosenbaum. The marriage certificate is signed by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schück of Szikszó.
275	Marriage certificate of Jakab Kronfeld and Rosi Roth The bridegroom: Jakab the son of Samuel Kronfeld, aged 26, resident in Inancs; the bride; Rosi Roth, daughter of Izrael, aged 20, resident in Szikszó; the marriage ceremony was performed in Szikszó on 5.5.1874 by Rabbi Samuel Ehrenfeld; the witnesses: Marton Silberger and Ignacz Roth. The marriage certificate was made out in 1924 in Szikszó and was signed by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schück.
276	Confirmation of payment of taxes A document of the Inancs local authority confirming that Jakab Kronfeld, owner of a grocery store, has paid the taxes for the years 1875-1879. The certificate was issued in 1905 and was stamped in 1938.
277	Confirmation of Roza Roth's citizenship The document confirms the Hungarian citizenship of Roza Roth ("holder of Hungarian citizenship for more than 20 years"), widow of Jakab Kronfeld who died in 1924. Roza lived in Krasznokvajda in Abauj-Torna County. The certificate also serves as a permit to stock wines and strong drink in the inn that she owned. The certificate was made out in Budapest in 1925.
278	Birth certificate of Izidor (Yitzchak) Kronfeld Izidor (Yitzchak) Kronfeld was born in 1879 in Beret Inancs, the legitimate son of Jakab Kronfeld, owner of an inn, and of his wife, Roza Roth. The midwife was Aunt Yali. The infant was circumcised on the eighth day after his birth by the <i>Mohel</i> [performer of ritual circumcision] Emanuel Singer. The <i>Sandak</i> [g-dfather]: Marton Silberger, a property owner in Inancs. The birth certificate was written in 1892 by the head of the Inancs rural council. The copy in our possession was made out in Szikszó in 1927 and is signed by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schück.
279	Marriage certificate of Izidor (Yitzchak) Kronfeld and Rezi Szenczer The bridegroom: Izidor (Yitzchak) Kronfeld the son of Jakab Kronfeld, and Rosa Roth, assistant carpenter, Jewish, born in April 1879, resident in Budapest; the bride: Rezi-Rezi Szenczer, daughter of David Szenczer and Sali-Rozalia Grünbaum, Jewish, born on 16.4.1884, resident in Szepesi-Moldava. The marriage ceremony was performed on 11.2.1908 in Szepesi-Moldava. The witnesses: Adolf Janovitz and Samuel Klein. The certificate was made out in 1927 in Szepesi in Hungarian and Slovakian.
280	Marriage certificate of David Szenczer and Zali (Sali) Grünbaum The bridegroom: David Szenczer, son of Samuel, resident in Rank Herlein, aged 24, single; the bride: Zali Grünbaum, the daughter of Farkas, resident in Pany, aged 22, single; the marriage ceremony was performed by Rabbi Izrael Billitzer. The witnesses: Mor Schwartz, Emanuel Szenczer. The certificate was made out in 1939 in Nagy-Ida and was signed by Rabbi Izrael Felberman.
281	Death certificate of Rozalia (Zali-Sali) Grünbaum-Szenczer Rozalia Grünbaum, wife of David Szenczer, Jewish, daughter of Vilmos Grünbaum and Rozalia Czimmer, died aged 74, on 18.3.1932 at 6 o'clock in the evening in Szepesi; cause of death: diabetes; notification was given by Jozsef Szenczer, Imre Liptaj. The certificate was made out in Szepesi in 1939.
282-3	Death certificate of David Szenczer David Szenczer, carpenter, widower of Rozalia Grünbaum; died aged 79 on 18.12.1932 at 2 p.m. in Szepesi; cause of death: intestinal obstruction; notification was given by: Jozsef Szenczer, Imre Liptaj. On the reverse side of the certificate it says: father - Samuel, mother - Rozi Fleischman. Born in 1854 in the village of Csakany. The certificate was made out in Szepesi in 1939 and was signed by the Rabbi of Szepesi, Moses Tannenbaum.

Page (in hebrew ed.)	Titles of the facsimiles
284	<p>Birth certificate of Laszlo Kronfeld (Grandfather Lady)</p> <p>Laszlo (Ladislav) Kronfeld was born on 4.12.1908 in Budapest, the son of Izidor Kronfeld and Rezső Szenczer. The father is Jewish, aged 29, the mother is Jewish, aged 24. The certificate was made out in 1918 in Budapest and translated into French with the authentication of the Hungarian consulate in Brussels in 1934.</p>
285	<p>Death certificate of Izidor (Yitzchak) Kronfeld</p> <p>Izidor Kronfeld, carpenter, married to Regina (Rezső) Szenczer, son of Jakab Kronfeld and Roza Roth, Jewish, died aged 67 on 22.3.1947 at 8 a.m. in Budapest; cause of death: cancer of the stomach; notification was given by Dr. Karoly Szamere. The certificate was made out in Budapest in 1947.</p>
286	<p>Certificate issued by Pierre Bekefi's employer - 4.4.1934</p> <p>Ehliahu Horvitz, the owner of the carpentry workshop in which Pierre was employed before he went into partnership with Grandfather Lady, confirms that the workbench and the tools belonging to Pierre remained in the workshop and that he can take them whenever he wants to. The owner of the workshop adds that Pierre worked to his complete satisfaction, and mentions that his salary is still due to him.</p>
287	<p>Guarantee for Keindi Blau's residence in Belgium - 1936</p> <p>Grandfather Lady and Pierre Bekefi stand surety for the support of Keindi (Varvara Blau) in Belgium and undertake that she will not work in the country. The purpose of the guarantee was to enable Keindi's continued residence in Belgium. The document was signed by all three together with the stamp of the carpentry workshop and the official stamps of the authorities.</p>
288	<p>Confirmation of Grandfather Lady's Hungarian citizenship</p> <p>Issued in Budapest in Hungarian - November 1936</p>
289	<p>Confirmation of Grandfather Lady's Hungarian citizenship</p> <p>Translated into French in Brussels - June 1940</p>
290	<p>Official contract of the sale of the furniture store - 4.5.1942</p> <p>The seller: Grandfather Lady; the purchaser: René Debève - sleeping partner; the price: 19,168.20 Belgian francs.</p>
291	<p>Secret agreement between Grandfather Lady and René Debève - 4.5.1942</p> <p>This agreement nullifies the official contract for the sale of the furniture store, confirming that the sale was fictitious</p>
292	<p>The carpentry workshop reverts to Grandfather Lady's ownership - 1.10.1944</p> <p>Mme Debève officially forgoes the "ownership" of the furniture store</p>
293	<p>Official letter of reply by the Belgian Ministry of Defense</p> <p>On 29.9.1938, the day on which the Munich Agreement was signed, and Czechoslovakia was left to the tender mercies of Germany, Grandfather Lady wrote to the Belgian Minister of Defense, saying that, as a descendant of Czech parents, he places himself and the furniture store at the disposal of the Belgian army. In the above photograph, the reply by the Belgian Ministry of Defense turns down Grandfather's offer on the grounds that only Belgians are accepted in the army.</p>
294-5	<p>Letter from Silvain de Ryck to Granny and Grandfather Lady in Caserne Dossin - 25.6.44</p> <p>Silvain writes to Granny and Grandfather Lady at the request of his father - Granny and Grandfather's landlord. (The landlord was of Flemish origin and did not have a good command of French). Among other things, Silvain explains that his father is trying, albeit unsuccessfully, to get permission to visit the barracks, and that he is acting to foil the plans of Mme Debève (the wife of the sleeping partner) to gain control of the furniture store. His father is also trying to effect the return of the furniture that was taken from their apartment during the first week of their internment, and he expects the furniture to be returned. (The furniture was never returned).</p>
296-7	<p>Letter to Granny and Grandfather Lady in Caserne Dossin - 8.8.1944</p> <p>The writer of the letter is a non-Jew (apparently the owner of the butcher's store at the corner of Rue van Oost, who had rented a room to Granny and Grandfather - a hiding place in time of need). She writes that she has received a postcard from Pierre and Buki in which they ask for a parcel of food and money. The writer explains that she has already got the money they asked for and that she will prepare a parcel containing dry white bread, sugar, smoked meat, tobacco and cookies. She says that she will send a parcel to them as well, and that a list of its contents has already been conveyed to the authorities. She hopes to get permission to visit them in the barracks. Twice she hints at the approaching end of the war.</p>

Page (in hebrew ed.)	Titles of the facsimiles
298	Form for the despatch of parcels to Caserne Dossin In order to receive parcels, the internees in the barracks had to fill in this form, indicating a list of the desired items and the name and address of whoever was preparing the parcel. At the bottom of the form are the times when parcels can be delivered to the internees, and the three days in the week on which parcels are sent from Brussels to the barracks.
299	A letter of thanks from the editor of an underground newspaper - 29.9.1944 During the last five months of the war the editor of the underground newspaper "Vrij Volk" lived in one of the apartments in Rue van Oost 58. Granny and Grandfather knew the identity of the tenant who was wanted by the Nazis.
300	Expression of gratitude after about fifty years A Jew who was helped by Granny and Grandfather Lady in 1939, and with whom there was no contact since, wrote a letter of condolence to Granny. In his letter he expresses once more his gratitude for the help he received from him.

List of pictures and maps in the hebrew edition

Page (in hebrew ed.)	Titles of the pictures, maps and facsimiles
10	Moshe Jozsef Blau and his wife Miriam - 1934
11	Transylvania, in central Europe
13	Moshe Jozsef Blau - 1886
14	Two maps of the Siebenburgen and Siladi quarter throughout various periods of time: 1/ Map of the area at the beginning of the British Mandate (1922) 2/ A modern map of the same area (1989). The Siebenburgen and Siladi quarter was the scene of battles during the War of Independence and most of its buildings were destroyed. Until the Six Day War the place was a no-man's-land.
15	Page 38 from the book of donations towards the Siebenburgen and Siladi Kolel. Details of the donations of “Reb Moshe Jozsef the son of Reb Dovid, of blessed memory, and his mother Chaya Hinda, his wife, Miriam, daughter of Reb Dovid Shlomo of blessed memory, and her mother, Gitel, Blau Jozsef Hadad”. Grandfather Jozsef donated 200 Kronen in six instalments spread over four and a half years: Teveth 5670 (1910) - Av 5674 (1914), as indicated on the lower section of the page.
16	Miriam Blau née Roth - 1934
17	Places in Northern Transylvania that were of importance in the lives of Family Blau
18	Channah Esther Bracha Nussbächer - 1906. Shortly before her marriage to Yitzchak Eizik Blau
19	1/ The “smooth” pavement: Keindi Blau on the smooth pavement - 1934 2/ The Law Court and the Lawyer's House: Irene Blau against the backdrop of the Law Court and the Lawyer's House. On the left: The Vocational School
20	1/ Grandfather Yitzchak’s House. The front of the house on snowy day 2/ A Corner in the Garden of the House. From right to left: Surika, Buki, Nendi and Alice (Granny) - 1936
21	Alice (sitting) and Blimi Blau
22	The Title Page of the Prayer Book “Tefilath Yisrael” The title page of the Prayer Book in which I discovered on the 18 th of Shevat 5790 the date of my grandmother’s death. Granny wrote in (in Hungarian) “Yahrzeit of my mother, 18 th of Shevat”.
23	Table of Yahrzeit Dates for 40 Years. Long-term table indicating the civil date of the Yahrzeit of Esther Bracha. Granny added (at the top left) her father’s Yahrzeit – 13 th of Sivan
24	1/ Leah Blau née Nussbächer - 1934 2/ Yitzchak Eizik Blau - 1934
25	1/ The Three Elder Blau Daughters - 1913. From right to left: Alice (Granny), Buki and Blimi 2/ The Five Blau Daughters - 1916. From right to left, at the back: Alice (Granny) and Blimi, at the front: Nendi, Buki and Keindi
26-27	Title Page of the Book “Kedushat Yom Tov”. On the title page Grandfather Yitzchak wrote the dates (Hebrew and Civil) of birth of his daughters. Note: top right, there are two separate groups, according to the girls’ mothers.
30	1/ The main street, with the Synagogue at the top of the street 2/ The Synagogue in Cehul Silvaniei. Granny marked with an arrow the place where the women in the family sat. 3/ The front of the Synagogue. Armin Blau’s daughters are in the foreground (from right to left): Lucu, Hedi and Irene.
31	Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Klein, Rabbi of Cehul Silvaniei 1883-1935
32	Granny’s School Report from the state school in Cehul Silvaniei. The report for the school year 1918-1919. All the marks are good and very good. The word “izraelita” appears next to the name Alice Blau
33	Yitzchak Eizik Blau in the uniform of the Austro-Hungarian army during World War I. The picture was taken in Prague where he served in the army
34	Grandfather Yitzchak’s inn: Yitzchak and Leah Blau sitting at the entrance to the inn with their grandson Ari Davidson from England (on a visit to Cehul Silvaniei – 1934)
35	Uncle Armin with his daughter and next-door-neighbor, sister-in-law, Leah Blau. At the gate of Armin’s house - 1937. In the background is the street which was originally called King Ferdinand Street, then Miklos Horthy Street, and later changed at least twice, according to the incumbent regime.

Page (in hebrew ed.)	Titles of the pictures, maps and facsimiles
36	Grandfather Jozsef at the age of 82 - 1939. With his great-grandson (Yettel's grandson) Moshe Dovid Nussbächer
37	Grandfather Jozsef with his son Armin and granddaughter Hedi. Outside the granary -- 1935
38	Aunt Yettel in her parents' home - 1935. Yettel Nussbächer née Blau seated (right) at the entrance of the house, with her parents, Grandfather Jozsef and Grandmother Miriam. Behind them, standing, Surika, (on the right) and Buki
40	Ari Davidson a year after his emigration from Cehul Silvaniei. London - 1930
41	The Annexation of Northern Transylvania by Hungary - August 1940
42	Street Poster in Budapest - Spring 1944
45	The route covered on the journey from Cehul Silvaniei to Simleul Silvaniei
47	Gendarmes in the Simleul Silvaniei ghetto
48	The deportation of the Jews of the Simleul Silvaniei Ghetto to Auschwitz - Sivan 5704 (June 1944)
49	The platform at the railway station in Auschwitz - 1944: 1/ Top: It was not easy to separate members of a family. At this stage the SS men still acted in moderation and explained to the deportees that everything was being done for their good. 2/ Bottom: a row of men and a row of women waiting for the selection.
50-51	The title page of the book "Noam Elimelech" Grandfather Yitzhak wrote the dates of the deaths and burial of his relatives on the title page of the book: My wife Channah Esther Bracha [my grandmother] My brother-in-law Shlomo Ze'ev [my grandmother's brother] Channah the daughter of Dovid Shlomo [my great-grandmother's sister] My mother Miriam [my great-grandmother] My mother-in-law Gitel Malka [my great-grandmother] My daughter Breindel [Granny's sister] Jozsef Hirsch, Nendi's husband added the last two lines: the date of the murder of Grandfather Yitzhak and his wife Leah - 14 th Sivan 5704
52	Granny's Jahrzeit calendar for the 13 th of Sivan: Permanent calendar for the 13 th of Sivan according to the civil date. The purpose of the calendar is to indicate the anniversaries of the deaths of: Blau Jozsef, Ignatz [Yitzhak Eizik], Armin, Aunt Juliska [Yettel Nussbächer], Aunt Netti etc.
53	Auschwitz - June 1944. Deportations to Auschwitz, selections, and the movement of Jewish laborers from Auschwitz to the labor camps: the women northwards to the area round Riga and Stutthof, the men westwards to Mauthausen.
54	The evacuation from the camp in Kaiserwald to the camp in Stutthof
56	The advance of the Soviet army - January 1945
58	The route of the return journey taken by Lucu and Irene from Gutttau to Cehul Silvaniei
59	Certificate entitling the holder to assistance, issued by the Jewish committee of Lublin. On 24.2.1945, the group of women from Cehul Silvaniei received the above certificate testifying to the fact that they had been sent from Auschwitz to the camp in Gutttau. The certificate, written in Polish, helped them with their journeys by train. The names and dates of birth of the seven women from Cehul Silvaniei and one other woman from Cluj are indicated on the certificate. Lucu (Judita) and Irene are the first two in the list.
61	1/ The Hoffman Family in Israel - Summer 1962. The first reunion with the extended family. From right to left: Aharon and Elazar Nachalon, Lucu, Tzivia and Surika Goldschmidt, Granny, Miriam, Giora, Dov Goldschmidt and Kutti Hirsch. The photo was taken shortly after Imre and Lucu made aliyah and shows them in their first home in Israel - the "Amishav" transit camp in Petach Tiqva. 2/ Lucu, Giora and Imre Hoffman - 1969
64	1/ Nendi and Kutti visiting their parents - grandparents in Cehul Silvaniei - February 1944 2/ Leah Blau with her grandson, Kutti. The last picture to be taken before their separation - 18.4.1944. (The deportation to the ghetto took place on 5.5.1944)
65	One of the buildings with the star of David. The entrance to a building housing Jews, Budapest -1944
66	Queuing up for the distribution of Schutz-Pässe at the entrance of the Swiss Embassy, Budapest - 1944
67	Jews at the entrance of the Swedish embassy - 1944. In the inset on the left, Adolf Eichmann in SS uniform
68	Simleul Silvaniei - April 1946. Nendi, Kutti and Joseph Hirsch
69	1/ Nendi and Kutti in Jerusalem - 1953 2/ Nendi on the balcony of her house - Kiriat Yovel - 1958
72	Places important in the lives of Family Nussbächer
75	Yecheskel Nussbächer-Salomon. 1850 - 1934
76	1/ Yecheskel Salomon's grave. The cemetery in Somcuta Mare. At the gravestone: his grandson, Jacob Salomon 2/ Mendel Salomon - Yecheskel's son. 1888 -1944

Page (in hebrew ed.)	Titles of the pictures, maps and facsimiles
78-79	<p>Passover Hagada in the possession of Yecheskel Salomon. The Hagada was printed in 1879 and includes the commentary of Rabbi Yecheskel Paneth, the Rabbi of Siebenburgen (=Transylvania), who has been mentioned above. The publication of the Hagada was made possible due to "subscribers" who bought the book ahead of its printing. Among the "names of the subscribers" appear several relations of the family in alphabetical order of their places of residence:</p> <p>אינטערדאם (= Entradam - Tradam) – יעקב נוסבעכער (= Ya'akov Nussbächer, the brother of my great-grandfather).</p> <p>נאסאד (= Nasaud) – Aharon Nussbächer (my great-grandfather)</p> <p>קלויזענבורג (= Cluj) – Zvi Dov Nussbächer</p> <p>שאמקערעג (= Sintereag) – Nathan the son of Abraham Nussbächer</p>
80-81	<p>The book "Yismach Moshe" which was in the possession of Yecheskel Salomon. The book by Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum (the head of the dynasty and the great-grandfather of Rabbi Yoelish of Satmar) was reprinted in 1908 with the help of Jews who purchased it before it was printed. Among those who ordered the book in advance were several members of the family, and their names appear in alphabetical order of their places of residence:</p> <p>נאסוד (= Nasaud) – יקותיאל נוסבעכר (= Jekuthiel Nussbächer, my grandmother's brother and the father of Aharon Nachalon)</p> <p>– יעקב נוסבעכר (= Ya'akov Nussbächer, the brother of my great-grandfather, Aharon)</p> <p>נ' באניא (= Baia Mare) – Shlomo Nussbächer</p> <p>נ' שאמקוט (= Somcuta Mare) – יחזקאל שאלאמאן (= Yecheskel Salomon, the brother of my great-grandfather Aharon)</p> <p>סי' טשעה (= Cehul Silvaniei) – החתן אייזיק בלויא מהאדאד (= the fiancé Yitzchak Eizik Blau of Hodod, my grandfather)</p> <p>שאמלויא (= Simleul Silvaniei) – שלמה זאב נוסבעכר (the brother of my grandmother Esther Bracha Blau)</p> <p>– אהרן יודא ווייס (the brother-in-law of my grandmother Esther Bracha and Aunt Netti's husband)</p>
82	Aharon Nussbächer. 1847 - 1905
89	David and Esther Nussbächer. Kassiel and his family stayed in their house in Bistrita. (Their children Tilli and Asher emigrated to Israel after the Holocaust)
92	Yettel in her parents' house in Cehul Silvaniei. Yettel (on the right) and Grandmother Miriam are sitting. Buki (on the right) and Surika are standing - 1934
97	<p>The boycott of the 1st of April 1933. Nazi guards outside the Teitz store in Berlin.</p> <p>On the poster on the right: Germans! Defend yourselves! Don't buy from Jews!</p> <p>On the poster on the left: Germans! Protect yourselves against the atrocious propaganda of the Jews! Buy only in German shops.</p>
99	The Newspaper "Hahed" - Adar 5689. The front page
101	<p>1/ Aharon near the Salne (warm springs) - January 1936. As settlement coordinator of the Poel Hamizrachi Aharon often stayed in the Beit She'an region</p> <p>2/ Thanks to the settlement of Jews the Salne area came to be Gan Hashlosha - January 1991. Uziel and Ruth Sarfatti</p>
102	The request by members of the "Religious Youth Division" to let Shulamit go to Kfar Yona
103	Henriette Szold's letter concerning Shulamit's training
105	<p>1/ Shulamit bringing drinking water from the spring</p> <p>2/ Arceda - sleeping quarters in the (former) stables of the Germans</p>
107	Shulamit and Aharon with their children - 1954. Miriam, Yehudit, Elazar, Esther and Pinchas
108	Elazar the son of Shulamit and Aharon Nachalon. Killed in action - 16 th Tishre 5734
109	Purchasers of the "Zionist Shekel" in 1931 in the Cehul Silvaniei community, confirming with their signatures the receipt of an invitation to the 17 th World Zionist Congress. Among the first in the list: Armin Blau and his wife Margit, also Nendi Blau
110	<p>1/ Buki and Bumi Nussbächer at their wedding - May 1937</p> <p>2/ Bumi being taken to his wedding by his father and grandfather Jozsef in the garden of Armin Blau's house</p>
111	Protocol of the elections that were held in Cehul Silvaniei in 1931. Buki (16 years old), who was not eligible to vote, wrote the protocol and signed it.
112	Moshe David Nussbächer. On a visit to Cehul Silvaniei - December 1940
116	The Sakaria - February 1940
117	The route taken by the illegal immigrants on the Sakaria
118	<p>A postcard which was sent to Avraham, to the internment camp in Sarafand</p> <p>The postcard went through the censor. It was sent by his father, Leibi, in June 1940</p>
119	Avraham in British Army uniform

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121	1/ Leah Nussbächer 2/ Leizer and Regina Nussbächer's daughter 3/ Leizer and Regina Nussbächer's son
122	Ya'akov Nussbächer perished aged 31
123	1/ Chaya Genendel Nussbächer disappeared aged 21 2/ Shlimeh Nussbächer disappeared aged 23 3/ Breindel Nussbächer disappeared aged 25
124	Sara Farkas née Nussbächer perished aged 40
125	1/ Ze'ev Nussbächer perished aged 38 2/ Aharon Nussbächer perished aged 34 3/ Esther Bracha née Nussbächer perished aged 33
126	1/ Leizer and Regina. Romania - 1946 2/ Shlomo Ze'ev Nussbächer (Farkas) and his wife and their sons David and Moshe. Australia - 1964(?)
128	Moshe Nussbächer
130	Monci and Erwin Spiegel on their wedding day - 1942
132	The crematoria in Auschwitz. Between the years 1942 -1944, one and a half million Jews were murdered in the gas chambers in Auschwitz, and their bodies were burnt in crematoria like those shown in the picture.
133	Auschwitz - an aerial photograph taken by the British on August 25 th 1944 In the photograph the train is clearly discernable (center left); also two gas chambers and the adjacent crematoria (on the right).
135	Partial diagram of Auschwitz 2 - Birkenau The entire concentration camp measured 2 km by 1km. On 22.8.1944 it held 105,168 prisoners. Camp B II c extended over an area of 750 by 150 meters. In the summer of 1944, 26,000 Jewish women from Hungary were held there. The huts in which Kicsi stayed are marked by arrows.
136	Auschwitz - 1944. Roll call in camp c. In the background the hut which was the kitchen. Very likely Kicsi is in this picture.
137	1/ Joli Nussbächer before her deportation in her native town Satu Mare 2/ Joli and Tilli Nussbächer in Israel
139	Location of the fronts in April 1945
143	Kicsi's route to Israel - from the town of Csenger to Israel
144	Avraham and Kicsi. Italy - 1946
147	1/ Netti Weisz née Nussbächer 2/ Oren Leib Weisz
148	Icu Weisz - 1972
149	Golda Weisz
150	Israel Weisz
151	Hungary - the area comprising Budapest and the Tapiosuly camp. The Tapiosuly labor camp was wiped off the face of the earth by the Hungarians, apparently deliberately. The people in the region do not even remember the name of the labor camp. When Israel visited the area a few years ago he tried, unsuccessfully, to find the place. The camp was located near Tapioszele, whose railway station served the labor camp.
152	Israel Weisz's forced march
153	The death march from Mauthausen to Gunskirchen
155	Ze'ev and Sheindel - 1922 (?)
156	The "Chevrat Shass" synagogue
157	The places where Mondi Weisz stayed
158	The Budapest Ghetto. Jews leaving the ghetto shortly after the liberation
160	Mondi Weisz - Kibbutz Ma'agan
161	Ruthenia, part of Hungary, 1938 - 1944. Until 1944 72,000 Jews lived in Ruthenia
163	A freight coach with a sentry box, like the one in which Reska and Matyi were taken to Auschwitz. This refurbished coach is on exhibition at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem
164	Dachau concentration camp
165	Reska Weisz's itinerary, Spring 1944 - Spring 1945
169	Budapest and the River Danube
170	The places where the families Kronfeld and Szenczer resided
171	1/ Regina Kronfeld née Szenczer 2/ Yitzhak Kronfeld with his daughter Klari
172	1/ Lady Kronfeld - Grandfather Lady 2/ Klari Kronfeld - 1930 3/ Ili Kronfeld

Page (in hebrew ed.)	Titles of the pictures, maps and facsimiles
173	1/ Yitzchak Kronfeld's carpentry workshop, in the basement 2/ Yitzchak Kronfeld's visiting card showing the address of the carpentry shop
174	David and Zali Szenczer and their children. Regina Kronfeld née Szenczer is seated first on the right
175	Giza - Gitel née Szenczer
176	1/ Annushka (Anna) née Szenczer 2/ Jozsef Szenczer and his wife Boske on their wedding day - 1930
177	Mania and her family in the Sixties. Standing: Mania and her husband Andras, Sitting: from right to left: Mania's son and mother, Ili Berkovits née Kronfeld, Regina Kronfeld, Istvan Berkovits
178	1/ Lady in the scouts (second from the left) 2/ Lady's Budapest visiting card. Denoting his trade: artistic carving in wood. The address is that of Family Kronfeld during the years 1921-1934.
179	1/ Lady's membership card for the year 1929 in the athletics and fencing club 2/ Lady
180	Prayer book - a farewell present to Grandfather Lady on the eve of his departure for France. The title page of the pocket prayer book that Grandfather Lady received from his uncle, Samu Szenczer on 8.10.1929. The dedication: "To dear Laczi! Whosoever believes in G-d will never be alone".
181	1/ Lady in Reims - France 1930. Lady (fourth from the right), captain of the football team 2/ Lady (second from the left) in Paris (?)
182	Invoice of the carpentry workshop "Petrik & Kronfeld" - Paris. Invoice in Grandfather Lady's handwriting dated 14.1.1933. Three days later Grandfather Lady was expelled from France.
183	Notification of prohibition of residence in France. Grandfather Lady was ordered to leave on 17.1.1933.
184	1/ Regina and Yitzchak Kronfeld - 1935(?) 2/ Granny visiting her husband's parents - 1936. From right to left: Granny, Regina and Ili Kronfeld
185	Grandmother Regina and her granddaughter, Miriam. Brussels - 1948
186	1/ Grandmother Regina praying at Grandfather Yitzchak's graveside. The Jewish cemetery in Budapest - 1960 2/ Grandmother Regina aged 86. Budapest - June 1970
187	Yahrzeit table for 30 years. A long term table, in Grandfather Lady's handwriting, showing the civil dates of the anniversaries of the dates of the deaths of his parents, Grandfather Yitzchak and Grandmother Regina. At the bottom, in Ili's handwriting, their Hebrew names: Yitzchak the son of Ya'akov and Rosa daughter of Sara, date of death and place of burial.
188	Klari née Kronfeld. 1/ Budapest - 1943. 2/ New York - 1958
189	1/ Ili Kronfeld, Budapest - 1935 2/ Istvan, Ili and Grandmother Regina - 1960. At the entrance to their house in Budapest (Trombitas u. 2)
190	Bor - Jewish labor servicemen in the copper mines. The forced laborers wore civilian clothes. From 1942 they wore a yellow band on their sleeves.
191	The death march from the Bor copper mines to Hungary. September - October 1944 On the map of Hungary are indicated some of the places where Karesi did forced labor.
192	The advance of the Soviet front in Hungary:The front line at the end of September 1944 ----- The front line at the end of October 1944
193	Northern Yugoslavia showing the places traversed by the returnees from Bor
194	1/ Karesi, Anita and Erzsi. Budapest - 1954 2/ Karesi. Israel - 1978
195	1/ Jeno Davidson at the beginning of his career as a cantor. London - 1930 2/ Blimi and Ari Davidson. London - 1931
196	1/ Granny in Brussels - 1931(?) 2/ Granny and Buki in Brussels. From right to left: Granny, Buki, ?, Gizi Lipinski (Granny's friend) March 1931
197	1/ Granny in London, May 1933 2/ Pierre and Buki Bekefi
198	1/ Granny-Alice Kronfeld née Blau - 1935 2/ Grandfather Lady - Laszlo Kronfeld - 1935
199	Granny and Grandfather Lady's marriage certificate
200	1/ The carpentry workshop in rue du Remblai. The building has since been demolished. 2/ The finest products of the workshop at the furniture show. At the entrance - Grandfather Lady. There was an annual furniture show in Brussels which lasted several days
201	1/ Keindi Blau. Cehul Silvaniei - 1931 2/ Keindi Blau. Brussels
203	1/ Business card of the furniture store in the rue Van Oost 2/ Rue Van Oost 3/ The courtyard with the carpentry workshop. My brother Josy at the entrance to the garden - 1956

Page (in hebrew ed.)	Titles of the pictures, maps and facsimiles
204	The kitchen with the bathtub (in the rear). Grandfather Lady cleaning a fish he had caught himself - 1969
205	1/ Victor De Ryck and his wife with Granny - in Granny and Grandfather Lady's apartment 2/ Silvain De Ryck and his wife - Victor's son and daughter-in-law
206	Europe - June 1940
207	Official notice affixed to the walls of the houses in Brussels - December 1940. An announcement telling the Jews of their obligation to register in the municipality as Jews
210	Dezso and Frici Muller. Their friendship with the Hungarian consul was instrumental in the release of Granny and Grandfather Lady
211	Nelly and Fernand Legros - About 1970
212	1/ The home of Family Legros in Mery. Avenue des Ormes 10, Mery Esneux 2/ Belgium. 1940 - 1944
214	1/ Pierre Bekefi 2/ Buki Bekefi née Blau
216	1/ The entrance to Caserne Dossin - 1957. The front of the barracks is decorated with flags in honor of the annual rally in memory of the 25,000 deportees who perished in the camps. In latter years my sister-in-law, Yehudit Kronfeld organized and led the ceremony. 2/ The memorial rally in the square in front of the barracks. Josy and Miriam Kronfeld are close to the wall on the right
217	1/ The inner courtyard - 1942. New prisoners arriving at the barracks 2/ Memorial plaque at the front of the barracks
218	1/ One of the halls in Caserne Dossin 2/ Postcard addressed to Granny in Caserne Dossin. The postcard was sent by Aunt Nendi in Budapest on 9.7.1944 and arrived in Brussels on 23.7.1944. The postcard which was sent to Rue Van Oost arrived there at the time when Granny was interned in Malines, and friends took the trouble to send it to the new address - Caserne Dossin. Nendi writes that she is very anxious because she has had no news from her parents. (In fact, they had been murdered more than a month earlier).
220	Place and time of the liberation of the remnant of our Family - Location of the army fronts in Europe in September 1944
222	Josy and Miriam Kronfeld
223	Josy Kronfeld's circumcision certificate. The uncle, Jeno Davidson, came especially from London to circumcise the infant.
224	1/ Grandfather Lady in the office of the store - 1947 2/ Products of the store at the annual furniture fair in Brussels - 1960. Grandfather Lady is standing at the end of the pavilion on the left.
225	1/ Article in the newspaper "Ha'aretz" - 9.6.1968. In 1968 Grandfather Lady participated in an international exhibition that was held in the Exhibition Gardens in Tel Aviv. An article reviewing the fair devoted several lines to Grandfather Lady and his products. 2/ The international fair in Tel Aviv - 1968. A display of tables
226	Family Kronfeld - 1961
227	1/ The family tent in a site off the beaten track in Hungary - 1961 2/ Preparing to go fishing - 1956. Miriam and Josy 3/ Grandfather Lady near the fish pond - 1972
228	Barnitzva invitations: Both my brother Josy and my son Gad are called Yitzchak - after Grandfather Yitzchak. On the Barnitzva Sabbath of both, 30 years apart, the weekly portion was "And these are the generations of Yitzchak".
229	Josy and Yehudit Kronfeld - 1971
230	1/ Grandfather Lady, In Tel Hashomer Hospital - 1978 2/ Granny with her granddaughter, Noah. Jerusalem - 1975

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My respected father - Laszlo-Lady Kronfeld

Lucu Blau-Hoffmann	Sara (Surika) Nussbacher-Goldschmidt
Uci Gold	Aharon Nachalon (Nussbacher)
Yekuthiel Hirsch	Shulamit Nachalon
Israel Weisz	Yehudit Nachalon-Ganot
Mondi Weisz	Ya'akov Salomon
Avraham Nussbacher	Karcsi Kovesi (Kronfeld)
Kicsi Nussbacher	Anita Kovesi-Wexler
Dovid Nussbacher	

In compiling the family tree I was also assisted by:

Edith Blau-Drori	Otto Nussbacher
Arye Blau	Alexander Nussbacher
Helen (Chaya) Blau-Schechter	Beatrice Nussbacher-Baumann
Yehudit Deutsch-Schwartz	Arye Nussbacher
Joseph Charish	Bebi Nussbacher-HersHKovitz
Sara Mattias-Alpha	Rezsi Basch-Pollack
Gizella Mozes-Burg	

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When I grew up in Belgium there were no relatives around me; no grandparents, no uncles, no aunts, no cousins; only father, mother and a brother. Since childhood I felt a striking contrast between me, the Jewish girl, and my gentile schoolmates, each of them encircled with a wealth of grandparents, uncles and so on. For a long time I tried to find out how my larger family had disappeared. Little by little I came to realise that my relatives did not survive the annihilation of European Jewry, and a large number of them had perished in the Holocaust.

The book tells the history of those members of the family that were among the six millions who found their end in the Holocaust, and tries to give flesh and blood to the souls that disappeared and left no trace. It also informs us about the few that survived the catastrophe; those who were saved because the love of the Land of the Fathers brought them to Eretz-Israel when it was still time, and those who survived after enduring the undescrivable suffering of Europe under the German yoke.